The New Criterion

November 2004

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

Notes & Comments, 1
Saintly institutions? *by Roger Kimball*, 5
Capote reconsidered *by Brooke Allen*, 10
Lessons of "Lonelyhearts" *by Theodore Dalrymple*, 17
The memory of Donald Justice *by David Yezzi*, 21
New poems *by Geoffrey Brock & Dan Brown*, 26

The media *by James Bowman*, 31; **Art:** Among gods and kings *by Karen Wilkin*, 36; Gallery chronicle *by James Panero*, 41; **Music:** New York chronicle *by Jay Nordlinger*, 44; Opera note *by Patrick J. Smith*, 48; **Reflections:** World literature in 1928 *by Sarah Ruden*, 50; **Fiction chronicle** *by Max Watman*, 54
Books: *Ovid* Metamorphoses, translated by Charles Martin *reviewed by Eric Ormsby*, 61; *Steven Ozment* A mighty fortress *reviewed by Daniel Johnson*, 65; *Josiah Bunting III* Ulysses S. Grant *reviewed by Victor Davis Hanson*, 68; *Stanley Crouch* The artificial white man *reviewed by Stefan Beck*, 71; *T. R. Reid* The United States of Europe *reviewed by Gerald Frost*, 73; **Shorter notices**, 76; **Notebook:** Thom Gunn, 1929–2004 *by Paul Dean*, 78

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Office Manager *Cricket Farnsworth*
Assistant to the Editors *David Spelber*
Editorial Intern *Marcus Plieninger*

Publisher 1982–1994 *Samuel Lipman*

Contributors to this issue

Brooke Allen's latest book is *Artistic License: Three Centuries of Good Writing and Bad Behavior* (Ivan R. Dee).

James Bowman is a resident scholar at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

Geoffrey Brock's translation of Cesare Pavese's complete poems, *Disaffections*, was named one of the Best Books of 2003 by *The Los Angeles Times*.

Dan Brown has a selection of poems in the *Zoo Anthology of Younger Poets*, available from Zoo Press.

Theodore Dalrymple is a doctor, an author, and a contributing editor of *City Journal*.

Paul Dean is Head of English at Dragon School, Oxford.

Gerald Frost is editor of the fortnightly London publication *Eurofacts*.

Victor Davis Hanson's latest book is *Carnage and Culture*.

Daniel Johnson, a historian, is a writer for *The Daily Telegraph*.

Jay Nordlinger is the managing editor of *National Review*.

Eric Ormsby's most recent book is *Facsimiles of Time: Essays on Poetry and Translation* (The Porcupine's Quill).

Sarah Ruden's translation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* is available from Hackett.

Patrick J. Smith is a former editor of *Opera News*.

Max Watman writes frequently for *The New York Sun* and other publications.

Karen Wilkin is writing introductory essays for the Stuart Davis catalogue raisonné, to be published by Yale University Press.

David Yezzi's book of poems, *The Hidden Model*, was published last year by TriQuarterly Books. He is the director of the Unterberg Poetry Center of the 92nd Street Y.

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Notes & Comments: November 2004

Derrida declawed

When the French philosopher Jacques Derrida died last month at seventy-four, the response was loud, passionate, and predictably divided according to demographic origin. If the response came from outside the academy, it tended to be bemused or critical. If a response came from the purlieus of the professoriate, however, it was likely to be sorrowful, eulogistic, even starry-eyed.

There was nothing surprising about this. "Deconstruction"—the movement that Derrida created in the mid-1960s and over which he presided with tireless attention until his demise—was always a hothouse phenomenon, ill-equipped to thrive in the rough-and-tumble of what Derrida would have scorned to call the real world. Again, this was hardly surprising. It was a central tenet of deconstruction—insofar, we hasten to add, as deconstruction can be said to have entertained anything so vulgarly pedestrian as a "tenet"—that "there is nothing outside the text": *en français*, "il n'y a pas de hors-texte." Think about that. You can see why we have always thought that Gertrude Stein admirably summarized the essential tendency of Derrida's philosophy when she observed about the city of Oakland that "there is no there there." Unfair to Oakland, possibly, but not, we think, to deconstruction.

The palm for the funniest eulogy of Derrida must go to the London *Times*, which weighed in with a leader on the question "Is Derrida dead? A conceptual foundation for the deconstruction of mortality." The *Times* was brief, but poignant. It began thus:

> Can there be any certainty in the death of Jacques Derrida? The obituarists' objective attempts to place his life in a finite context are, necessarily, subject to epistemic relativism, the idea that all such scientific theories are mere "narrations" or social constructions. Surely, a postmodernist deconstruction of their import would inevitably question the foundational conceptual categories of prior science—among them, Derrida's own existence—which become problematised and relativised. This conceptual revolution has profound implications for the content of future postmodern and liberatory science of mortality.

What makes this funny instead of fatuous is the fact that the writer is engaged in parody. Can the same be said for Derrida's encomium for his friend Paul de Man? Born in Belgium, de Man wound up at Yale where he emerged as the most celebrated and cerebral of literary deconstructionists. Alas, in 1987, four years after de Man's death, it transpired that the great man had written scores of articles for Nazi-controlled papers during the war. Sample from March, 1941: "one thus sees that a solution to the Jewish question that envisions the creation of a Jewish colony isolated from Europe

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would not involve deplorable consequences for the literary life of the West." Embarrassing to the deconstructionist brotherhood, that. Or so one might have thought. Although Derrida was himself of Jewish origin, he seems to have been more troubled by criticism of de Man than de Man's anti-Semitic effusions:

> Unable to respond to the questions, to all the questions, I will ask myself instead *whether responding is possible* and what that would mean in such a situation. And I will risk in turn several questions *prior to* the definition of a *responsibility*. But is it not an act to assume in theory the concept of responsibility? One's own as well as the responsibility to which one believes one ought to summon others?

Derrida concludes his sixty-page exercise in exculpation by comparing critics of de Man to Nazi thugs:

> To judge, to condemn the work or the man on the basis of what was a brief episode [in fact, it lasted from 1939–1943], to call for closing, that is to say, at least figuratively, for censuring or burning his books is to reproduce the exterminating gesture against which one accuses de Man of not having armed himself sooner with the necessary vigilance.

OK, no one actually called for "censuring or burning" de Man's books. But Derrida knew that you can get a lot of rhetorical mileage out of suggesting that criticism of de Man's behavior during the war was tantamount, "at least figuratively," to "censuring or burning his books"—we're all against that, right? And he upped the rhetorical ante even higher by using the word "exterminating" in the next phrase. The Nazis burned books and exterminated lots of people; the callous critics of Paul de Man somehow did the same thing "at least figuratively" by exposing Paul de Man.

Derrida's was only one of many anguished, exculpatory responses by deconstructionists to the revelations about de Man's flirtations with Nazism. For many of us, that episode offered a graphic illustration of something that had been obvious about deconstruction all along: that it was a mendacious intellectual parlor game, completely divorced from, indeed impervious to, reality. This is something that has been pointed out early and often by critics inside and outside the academy. In 1977, for example, the philosopher John Searle wrote "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida," an attack on deconstruction that was devastating—we would have said "unanswerable," except that Derrida instantly swung into print with a tenebrous piece of sophistry that would have been funny if it had not been in earnest. ("When I say that I do not know John R. Searle, that is not 'literally' 'true.' For that would seem to mean that I have never met him 'in person,' 'physically,' and yet I am not sure of that," etc., etc.)

Among other things, Derrida's response to Searle illustrated the Janus-faced character of deconstruction. For Derrida's followers, deconstruction was a weapon, an instrument of subversion. The statement that "there is nothing outside the text" was intended to throw a monkey wrench into any traditional account of truth or value. Derrida spoke in this context of "the destruction," the "de-construction," of traditional accounts of rationality "particularly the signification of *truth*." But try pointing that out and you get the beneficent face of deconstruction: all he meant by "il n'y a pas de hors-texte," Derrida says in responding to Searle, is that "there is nothing outside context." Oh. Deconstruction: bombshell or banality—depending on who's asking.

Yet criticism, however devastating, however unanswerable intellectually, has never mattered to deconstructionists. And that is because their commitment to deconstruction is primarily one of faith, not reason. No *argument* can shake their embrace of the dogma because it was never argument that mattered to them. Indeed, to argue against deconstruction shows that you don't really

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understand it—even to ask what it might mean to "understand" deconstruction betrays a frame of mind unattuned to its governing protocols. Deconstruction exerted the seductive call of—no, not a religion exactly, but an *ideology*, a system of ideas that seemed, if only you closed your eyes and granted its premises, to explain everything and yet be beholden to nothing. In this, deconstruction resembles Hegelianism, Marxism, and Freudianism, other ideologies renowned for their imperviousness to "mere facts."

This aspect of the deconstructionist creed helps explain a curious disparity. As its name implies—and as the writings of Derrida and his followers amply demonstrate—deconstruction is primarily a negative enterprise. It is about subverting established meanings, exposing unacknowledged interests and intentions. Like Marxism, like Freudianism, deconstruction sets itself against inherited values. Derrida writes about Rousseau and finds himself dilating on masturbation. He writes about philosophers and their ideas but concludes that "the names of author or of doctrines have . . . no substantial value." And so on. Deconstruction is above all a *disillusioning* philosophy.

How curious, then, that the partisans of deconstruction were so ostentatiously *pious* in their responses to criticism of The Master. *The New York Times* runs an obituary which notes that "Many readers found his prose turgid and baffling." In response, two Derrida epigoni (joined by "more than 300 academics, architects, artists, musicians and writers") write a hand-wringing letter to the *Times* that associates Derrida with "Einstein, Wittgenstein, and Heisenberg," and protests that he "wrestled with central works of the Western tradition, including Plato, Shakespeare and the Declaration of Independence, none of which he slighted." (Well, a child tearing up a book hasn't exactly "slighted" it, either.)

For pure unctuousness, however, no one has yet topped Professor Mark C. Taylor, a well-known Derrida groupie who teaches at Williams College. Writing on the OpEd page of *The New York Times*, Professor Taylor also begins by invoking Wittgenstein. (How sweet it is to imagine what the man who castigated most philosophy as an "idling of language" would have to say about the work of Derrida!) Professor Taylor then proceeds to give us a kinder, gentler Derrida. To uncouth ignoramuses—"people addicted to sound bites and overnight polls"—Derrida's works might seem "hopelessly obscure." But we sophisticated chaps know that his famously convoluted prose "reflects the density and complexity characteristic of all great works of philosophy, literature and art."

Leave aside the question of whether "all great works" of intellect and art really do exhibit "density and complexity." (That's the cliché, but is it true? Surely some, perhaps many, great works are great on account of their clarity and simplicity.) Professor Taylor's main goal is to present Derrida as a sort of theologian manqué, "preoccupied with religion," human fallibility and imperfection in all its forms, cognitive, moral, and political. Professor Taylor coyly emphasizes the political. In this uncertain, strife-torn world, he says, there is an understandable but dangerous desire for "simplicity, clarity, and certainty." And *this* desire, Professor Taylor tells us, "is responsible, in large measure, for the rise of cultural conservatism and religious fundamentalism." Get it? George W. Bush blurs into Osama bin Laden. Thank God—or, rather, thank Derrida, who has come to teach us about a form of belief "that embraces uncertainty and enables us to respect others whom we do not understand." In Professor Taylor's hands, Derrida emerges as a messianic figure, a hybrid of Martin Heidegger, St. Francis, and Kahlil Gibran.

It is a nauseating performance, as unfair to Jacques Derrida as it is to the readers of *The New York Times*. Professor Taylor even supplies a homely anecdote to conclude his billet-doux, fondly recalling one time (one of

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many, please note!) he visited Derrida outside Paris. The Great Sage graciously insisted on picking up the Taylor family at their hotel and had toys waiting for the children when they arrived at the Derrida homestead for dinner. All true, no doubt—and completely beside the point. Professor Taylor has given us a Derrida with a muzzle and with the claws removed. It makes for a more respectable figure. But it leaves entirely mysterious how such an emasculated creature could ever have seduced hundreds of politically and intellectually antinomian academics like Professor Taylor. No, it is much better to do Derrida the courtesy of taking him at his word. And then what? For our part, we think that the English philosopher Roger Scruton had it right when he observed that "A writer who says that there are no truths, or that all truth is 'merely relative,' is asking you not to believe him. So don't."

What were they thinking?

Throughout its history, the Swedish Academy has certainly made a number odd choices for the coveted honor of the Nobel Prize for literature. One thinks, for example, of Dario Fo, the Italian communist-anarchist playwright who scooped up the prize in 1997, or José Saramago, a Portuguese communist who got it in 1998. Sure, there have been plenty of worthy Nobel laureates—Rudyard Kipling, W. B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, T. S. Eliot, and Thomas Mann for starters. But an equally impressive list could be made of those who did not get the prize, beginning with Henry James, Marcel Proust, Rainer Maria Rilke, Franz Kafka, and Wallace Stevens. In recent decades, the prize has often been more a badge advertising political—that is, politically correct—virtue than a recognition of literary accomplishment. There have been exceptions—we still remember the gasp of amazement in 2001 when it was announced that V. S. Naipaul had won. More and more, though, the Nobel Prize has gone to a person who has the correct sex, geographical address, ethnic origin, and political profile—"correct" being determined by the commissars at the Swedish Academy. So it was no surprise when a distinct mediocrity like Toni Morrison got the prize in 1993: an American, yes, which was a drawback, but at least Morrison was the right sex, the right color, and spouted the right opinions.

Laureates like Toni Morrison, Dario Fo, and José Saramago cheapen the Nobel Prize. But this year's laureate, the Austrian novelist and playwright Elfriede Jelinek (born 1946), marks a new low. It is likely that you hadn't heard of Jelinek before—or, if you had, it was probably only because her sadomasochistic fantasy *The Piano Teacher* (1983) was made into a movie with Isabelle Huppert in 2001. Other titles by Jelinek have been translated into English—*Lust* (1989), for example, an unrelieved carnival of sexual and physical brutality culminating in a woman's murder of her son. Jelinek is a radical left-wing fantasist. She was a member of the Austrian Communist Party from 1974 to 1991—a period when, as Stephen Schwartz pointed out in *The Weekly Standard*, the organization "was little more than a KGB network." With the fall of the Soviet Empire, support for its satellites dried up, so Jelinek left the party. But she didn't abandon her left-wing animus. Her most recent work is *Bambiland* (2003), a stream-of-consciousness anti-American effusion masquerading as a play. Most of her work is a species of arty pornography. The Nobel judges rhapsodized about Jelinek's "musical flow of voices and counter-voices . . . that with extraordinary linguistic zeal reveal the absurdity of society's clichés and their subjugating power." But what the reader actually finds is not the revelation of but a shameless wallowing in clichés. The Swedish Academy has made plenty of mistakes. In choosing to honor Elfriede Jelinek it has made itself a laughingstock.

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Saintly institutions? Notes on a modern prejudice

by Roger Kimball

Sometimes I think all the trouble in the world is caused by intellectuals who have an "idea."
—David Hare, *Stuff Happens*

Saints should always be judged guilty until proven innocent, though the tests that have to be applied to them are not, of course, the same in all cases.
—George Orwell, "Reflections on Gandhi"

Yet sit and see,
Minding true things by what their mock'ries be.
—Shakespeare, *Henry V*, iv:1

When I was in London recently, I happened to walk down Haymarket on my way to Trafalgar Square. As I neared Pall Mall, I caught the glint—white embossed lettering on cerulean field—of a blue plaque, one that I'd not noticed before.

As any visitor to London knows, the blue plaques are one of the quiet glories of the city. The attractively glazed discs, about the size of a luncheon plate, punctuate the cityscape, commemorating an impressive procession of historical worthies. Did you know that Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727), "natural philosopher," lived on Jermyn Street? Or that Mozart (1756–1791) "composed his first symphony" at 180 Ebury Street, SW1? I have several times taken a short "blue plaque tour" in some corner of London with a friend whose knowledge of London is as encyclopedic as it is infectious. There are some striking conjunctions. Hyde Park Gate, for example, was within a couple of decades home to Robert Baden-Powell, "British general and founder of the scout movement," Leslie Stephen, the great Victorian scholar (and father of Virginia Woolf), Winston Churchill, and Jacob Epstein, the sculptor. The next street over displays plaques for Robert Browning and Henry James. Try to imagine *that* neighborhood colloquy.

What stupendous cultural and political achievements those blue plaques bespeak: more than 800 statesmen, scientists, artists, writers, and other notables. What extraordinary talent, what extraordinary energy, London has sheltered! In recent years, of course, the quality of blue-plaque commemoration, like just about everything else in England, has bowed somewhat to the pressure of multiculturalism and political correctness. Feminists have scoured the past for available females; "persons of color" have touted candidates who share their skin color or national origin; other partisans of virtue have urged the inclusion of various figures whose chief distinction is the rectitude and vociferousness of their political orientation. I knew this, and should therefore not have been surprised, as I ambled down Haymarket, to find that the plaque I noticed commemorated Ho Chi Minh.

Yet I *was* surprised. How striking, I though, that Ho, a totalitarian enemy of gentle civilization, should be thus decorously honored! (In 1913, it turned out, he

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had worked in a hotel that once stood on the spot.) What struck me as even odder was the thing he was honored for. Newton was a "natural philosopher"; Mozart composed symphonies; Ho Chi Minh, 1890–1969, was the "founder of modern Vietnam." Well, yes. But supposing Stalin had had a stint in London. Would we then have "Josef Stalin, 1879–1953, Soviet agricultural reformer"?

Now, there is a sense in which Ho Chi Minh was the "founder of modern Vietnam" just as Stalin did a great deal to change the habits of farmers in the Soviet Union. But these truths are tendentious: they are one-sided, deceptive truths because in stating a fact they omit the context that explains the fact. Ho Chi Minh was a mass murderer—not in Stalin's league, it is true, but he did the best he could with the tools he was given. Yet to the Left, Ho is a hero, a sainted figure (as—let us not forget—was Stalin until fairly recently). Who can forget the raptures of American intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s about Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Cong? Remember Susan Sontag's "Trip to Hanoi" (1968), where she explained the real problem for the North Vietnamese trying to fight the Americans is that they "aren't good enough haters."

> They genuinely care about the welfare of the hundreds of captured American pilots and give them bigger rations than the Vietnamese population gets, "because they're bigger than we are," as a Vietnamese army officer told me, "and they're used to more meat than we are." People in North Vietnam really do believe in the goodness of man . . . and in the perennial possibility of rehabilitating the morally fallen.

It is in this context that we must understand the comment of an American admirer of Castro who enthusiastically described him as "a sort of Cuban Ho Chi Minh." No higher praise was available.

My brief trip in England provided ample opportunity to contemplate the phenomenon of secular canonization—and it's converse, secular demonization. My chief reason for visiting Albion was to attend a conference in Tunbridge Wells on the subject of "Corrupt Humanitarianism," with special reference to international organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union. Tunbridge Wells might seem the ideal place in which to contemplate the depredations of cosmopolitan behemoths like the UN and the E.U. A storied watering hole some fifty miles southeast of London, it was for decades home to maiden aunts (like Jack's imaginary aunt in *The Importance of Being Earnest*) and ex-India army colonels who wrote furious letters to *The Times* invariably, or at least proverbially, signed "Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells."

The town retains a trace of that grateful parochialism, though modernity—or perhaps it is post-modernity—has made many inroads. Still, Tunbridge Wells, though smarter and more cosmopolitan than in former days, still seems proudly English, something that London ceased being some years ago.

I am searching for some rays of light, some good news, that emerged from our discussion at Tunbridge Wells. I am not sure that there were any. One topic of conversation was the UN oil-for-food scandal, a relief program designed (at least ostensibly designed) to allow Saddam Hussein to sell oil in exchange for baby formula, medical supplies, and kindred humanitarian goods. As Claudia Rosett (a participant in the conference) has pointed out in several brilliant pieces of investigative journalism, what actually happened amounted to the biggest financial scandal in the history of humanitarian aid. Purportedly set up to aid the Iraqi people, it turned out to be a means whereby Saddam enriched himself and his cronies to the tune of nearly $10 billion while the UN skimmed off nearly $2 billion in "commissions" and administrative fees. All told, Rosett estimated, the program involved a staggering $65 billion.

The mechanics of the scandal are convoluted. What is noteworthy is how rela-

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tively little outrage it has inspired. Remember the Enron scandal? My, how *The New York Times* went to town on that outrage. The oil-for-food scandal dwarfs Enron and involves several major figures on the international stage, beginning with Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the UN. It has been reported but not denounced, at least not by the *Times* and other organs of politically correct opinion. Why not?

One reason was suggested by another participant in our discussion at Tunbridge Wells. Some institutions—and indeed some individuals—enjoy a sort of plenary indulgence in the court of liberal opinion. They are by definition "saintly." The UN enjoys this semi-beatified status. So do Oxfam, the BBC, and Amnesty International. So do Kofi Annan, Princess Diana, Bob Geldof, and Bill Clinton. So, far that matter, do Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro, and, *ex officio*, Karl Marx. If they do wrong it is only because they are endeavoring to do good. Their intentions are noble, hence their malfeasance is automatically exonerated—indeed, it is not really malfeasance at all but an excess of "idealism." Your mother probably told you that "the road to hell is paved with good intentions." Your mother was right. But her wisdom is too deep—or perhaps it is not deep enough—to impress the politically correct partisans of benevolence.

A book could be written about the dynamics of saintly institutions. Let me share one anecdote that John O'Sullivan, another participant in that conference, related when the subject of saintly institutions was broached. When Mr. O'Sullivan was an editor at the London *Times*, he read Gertrude Himmelfarb's essay "The 'Group': British Marxist Historians," a penetrating look at the life and work of the English communist historians who congregated around the journal *Past and Present*: Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill, E. P. Thompson, R. H. Hilton, and others. Himmelfarb's essay is notable both for its measured tone and its explosive revelations about the extent to which several members of the group regularly subordinated their work as historians to a party line, indeed, to the Communist Party line. Himmelfarb shows in meticulous detail how they deliberately let "their politics inform their practice as historians."

Hobsbawm, for example, has freely acknowledged that "for obvious reasons" he and his communist colleagues felt "very constrained about twentieth-century history." ("Constrained?" Read: "muzzled.") Being a loyal communist did require a certain . . . pliability. As Himmelfarb drily observes, for the first two years that Britain was at war with Germany, if one was a British communist one had to be anti-war and pro-German. Of course that changed abruptly with Barbarossa, Hitler's surprise attack on the Soviet Union in 1941. But asked how he felt and behaved about the Hitler-Stalin pact, Hobsbawm said, "Oh, like most people I was absolutely loyal to the party line."

It was a loyalty he maintained with breathtaking sang-froid. The post war years, Himmelfarb notes, were

> a time when intellectuals, scientists, and artists, to say nothing of politicians and political dissidents, were the victims of systematic purges; when Lysenkoism was the official doctrine of state, and when not only Darwinism but other manifestations of "bourgeois science," such as the theory of relativity, were proscribed . . . when the trials in Hungary, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia recalled the Moscow trials of the thirties; and when the "Doctor's Plot" of 1952–1953 was accompanied by an anti-Semitic campaign in the course of which a hundred or more Jewish intellectuals were shot.

Himmelfarb is right that, as loyal party members, Hobsbawm and his colleagues "tacitly sanctioned" these events.

And what should we think of that "loyalty," if unwavering devotion to a murderous ideology deserves the term? David Pryce-Jones, writing about Hobsbawm in these pages, put it well when he observed

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that "The man who sets dogs on concentration camp victims or fires his revolver into the back of their necks is evidently a brute; the intellectual who devises justifications for the brutality is harder to deal with, and far more sinister in the long run."

But is Hobsbawm widely regarded as a sinister character? Speaking for himself and his colleagues, Hobsbawm said they "look back without regret on their years in the Group." Indeed, regret does not seem to occupy a prominent place in Hobsbawm's moral economy. In 1994, he discussed the former Soviet Union with a television interviewer. What Hobsbawm's position comes down to, the interviewer suggested, "is saying that had the radiant tomorrow actually been created, the loss of fifteen, twenty million people might have been justified?" Hobsbawm: "Yes."

And why not? Far from being called to account for his betrayal of history for politics, Hobsbawm has been widely adulated as "the greatest living historian" and boasts a score of honorary degrees. A portrait of Hobsbawm and other members of "The Group" hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in London. "No historian now writing in English," wrote one admirer, "can match his overwhelming command of fact and source." Hobsbawm's government apparently agreed, for in the late 1990s he was named Companion of Honor.

Hobsbawm is one of the untouchables, a "saintly figure" whose professions of virtue (equality, freedom, brotherhood, an end to suffering and exploitation . . .) exempt him, in the eyes of the liberal establishment, from moral accountability. This was the point of John O'Sullivan's anecdote. When he read Himmelfarb's essay, he knew it was dynamite. He prepared an edited version for the *Times* and was set to run it when a colleague objected. Why? Because it was what Americans would call "red-baiting": pointing a finger at a self-declared communist and exposing him as . . . a communist. The editor of the paper was brought in to adjudicate and sided with O'Sullivan's colleague. The issue was not whether Himmelfarb was right: apparently all concerned agreed that she was. The issue was the inviolability of certain political positions. Hobsbawm's communism, handmaiden though it was to the most murderous ideology in history, enjoyed that diplomatic immunity.

A world populated by "saintly" figures and institutions would be incomplete without the converse: *demonized* figures and institutions, entities that are regarded as evil not because of what they do but because of their assigned role in the passion play of liberal self-promotion. Who are today's demons? It is a familiar lot. Some long-running favorites that came up in our discussion at Tunbridge Wells were Exxon (greedy multinational oil corporation), the British Conservative Party (partisans of greed and selfishness), and the Roman Catholic Church (for about eighty-seven different reasons). But the chief demon, the Satan who presides over an unholy host, is America, epitomized by George W. Bush and his administration.

European anti-Americanism is a familiar feature of the cultural landscape today. But what is extraordinary is not so much the virulence of the phenomenon as the aura of ineluctability that attends it. America occupies an indispensable place in today's politically correct cosmology. Along with a supporting cast that includes Israel and the demonized institutions mentioned above, America is the repository of the shattered dreams and wayward programs of the Left. If there is misery in the world, the root cause is, somehow, America: its power, its influence, its supposed irresponsibility, its stupidity, its cupidity, its very being.

I thought about this while watching *Stuff Happens*, Sir David Hare's new play at the National Theatre about the American role in the war in Iraq. The title repeats Donald Rumsfeld's comment when asked about reports of looting in Iraq following the liberation of Baghdad. In an "Author's Note" accompanying the play, Sir David describes the work as "a history play, which happens to center on very recent history."

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But that is not really accurate. *Stuff Happens* is a fiery political sermon delivered from the stage instead of a pulpit. Several English reviewers, although acknowledging Sir David's left-wing, anti-American bias, nonetheless described the play as surprisingly even-handed. I disagree. I found it underhanded. Sir David cleverly endows his bad guys—George W. Bush, Tony Blair, and most of their advisors, especially Dick Cheney—with a semblance of humanity. But that is only to highlight their moral cravenness. The characters remain caricatures, but caricatures into which a little air has been pumped.

A large part of *Stuff Happens* is a mosaic of verbatim quotations from the principals. If nothing else, *Stuff Happens* shows to what extent even exact quotation can be used in the service of propaganda. All it takes is a willful adjusting of context and invention of intervening scenes to shepherd the meaning in the right, i.e., the left, direction. "The United States of America Has Gone Mad." John le Carré's piece to *The Times*, written a few months before the invasion of Iraq, appears in the playbill for *Stuff Happens* and epitomizes its rhetorical temperature. "What is at stake is not an imminent military or terrorist threat," le Carré wrote, "but the economic imperative of U.S. growth"—that and America's "need to demonstrate its military power to Europe and Russia and China, and poor mad little North Korea."

Sir David employs many devices to stir up contempt for President Bush and his advisors. One that seemed particularly effective with the audience was to mock the President's religion. Two or three times in the course of the play, the President is shown opening a meeting with a prayer, asking that God "direct our thoughts," "give us wisdom, that we may surely do good. In thy name." To which the other characters on stage say "Amen," and the audience titters. (It is one of the ironies of our secular sainthood that only demons believe in God.)

The dramatic crux of the play came about half-way through when a female "Palestinian academic" takes the stage and delivers a soliloquy about the plight of the Palestinians, the perfidy of Israel, and the arrogance of the United States. "We are," she concludes, "the Jews of the Jews." Sir David had the audience eating out of his hand.

If *Stuff Happens* has any heros, they are Hans Blix—who is called back from a trek in Patagonia with his wife to resume his job as arms inspector in Iraq—and Colin Powell, who emerges as a voice of reason in a wilderness of superhawks and madmen. One line attributed to Powell found great favor with the audience: "I want my country to be less arrogant." But it was another line attributed to him that seemed to me to capture the essential point about the play: "Sometimes I think all the trouble in the world is caused by intellectuals who have an 'idea.'" One of the governing ideas of the chattering class today is that the pursuit of national self-interest is an expression of culpable selfishness, that the age of the nation state is waning, and that America is a summary of atavistic attitudes standing in the way of humanitarian progress. Out of such stuff are saints and demons fabricated.

When the play ended, and the audience erupted into applause, I recalled a few sentences Bush spoke at a meeting of his national security team after 9/11. Sir David quotes it verbatim: "I want you all to understand that we are at war, and we will stay at war until this is done. Nothing else matters. Everything is available for the pursuit of this war. Any barriers in your way, they're gone. Any money you need, you have it. This is our only agenda." That is not, perhaps, evidence of a progressive outlook. But it is evidence of a realistic one, *pace* David Hare. "History," Walter Bagehot once observed, "is strewn with the wrecks of nations which have gained a little progressiveness at the cost of a great deal of hard manliness, and have thus prepared themselves for destruction as soon as the movements of the world gave a chance for it." Where is Walter Bagehot today?

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Capote reconsidered

by Brooke Allen

When Truman Capote died in 1984, just before his sixtieth birthday, his life had been in a shambles for years. The phenomenal success of *In Cold Blood* (1966) fulfilled all his dreams, but at that moment he began inexplicably to implode. His crack-up was as public and spectacular as any in recent history. Suffering from what is known as free-floating anxiety, he ingested heroic amounts of alcohol and patronized all the pill-pushing Dr. Feelgoods who flourished in New York during the Sixties and Seventies. He derived no benefit from his frequent stays in clinics and hospitals, often returning to the bottle the very evening of his release. Increasingly detached from his longtime partner, Jack Dunphy, who had been a stabilizing force for him, he embarked on a series of inappropriate relationships, culminating in one with a suburban heterosexual bank official, John O'Shea: this was an insane *mésalliance* that turned into an orgy of mutual abuse.

The 1975 publication in *Esquire* of a chapter from his work in progress, *Answered Prayers*, made him a social pariah: his rich and beautiful friends went mad with rage when they read the thinly disguised, deeply hurtful descriptions of themselves by the adorable little man they had come to think of as a favorite household pet, an *ami de la maison*. How could he ever have thought he would get away with it? What demon of perversity, what layers of self-delusion could have persuaded him that he could write such things without causing offense?

During his last few years, Capote's appearances in the gossip columns and magazines were pathetic, featuring pictures of him being led off the stage incoherently drunk at a reading, being carried comatose from his apartment after an overdose, snorting coke with Steve Rubell and Bianca Jagger at Studio 54. He had become a grotesque to the younger generation, a terrible example for their elders, who could remember the great talent of the young Capote and comprehend the tragedy of its destruction. "Something in my life has done a terrible hurt to me," he said, at a loss to explain his own despair, "and it seems to be irrevocable."

In honor of what would have been Capote's eightieth birthday, Random House and its subsidiary, the Modern Library, are doing an important service for their troublesome but lucrative author by bringing out a collection of his letters, edited by his biographer Gerald Clarke, and by producing new editions of his first novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, and *The Complete Stories of Truman Capote*.[1] It is a stunning experience to reread this fiction—mostly written when he was in his early twenties—and to realize how very golden this golden boy was. The image of the un-

1 *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, by Truman Capote; Modern Library, 224 pages, $19.95.
The Complete Stories of Truman Capote, introduction by Reynolds Price; Random House, 300 pages, $24.95.

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happy middle-aged clown dissolves; we are in the presence of a tremendous talent, and a fully mature technique as well. Norman Mailer's judgment that Capote was the most perfect writer of their generation—"he writes the best sentences word for word, rhythm upon rhythm"—seems true and just.

Capote decided upon his literary vocation in early childhood and never looked back. "How did it happen? That's what I ask myself," he said to his biographer. "My relatives were nothin', dirt-poor farmers. I don't believe in possession, but something took over inside me, some little demon that made me a writer." Capote is the perfect illustration of his own belief that education can neither make nor break a novelist. His own was sketchy, to say the least; he barely finished high school, with grades so bad that some teachers considered him subnormal.

Though Capote never wrote an autobiography, parts of his childhood are quite faithfully recorded in his novel *The Grass Harp* and his stories "A Christmas Memory," "The Thanksgiving Visitor," and "One Christmas," all included in this anthology—and also in his childhood friend Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, where he appears as the strange little Dill. He was the progeny of a small-town con-man, Arch Persons, and Lillie Mae Faulk, an ambitious girl itching to get out of Monroeville, Alabama. Their marriage was brief, its break-up stormy. Southern Gothic, as so many examples have proved, is not a literary affectation so much as a literal representation of local life, and one of Capote's most outrageous pieces of fiction, the short story "My Side of the Matter" (1945), is not in fact an imitation of Eudora Welty's "Why I Live at the P.O.," as one might think at first, but a perfectly truthful portrait of Arch and Lillie Mae's absurd honeymoon.

The custody battle over little Truman was ugly and prolonged, but in truth neither parent really wanted the responsibility of caring for him. Eventually Lillie Mae won the tussle; she was a marginally more responsible person than the hopeless Arch. She embarked on a series of jobs, adventures, and love affairs, dragging the child along for the ride; his earliest memories were of being locked in hotel rooms while she went out on the town or slept with various transient boyfriends. "I had an intense fear of being abandoned," he later said, "and I remember practically all of my childhood as being lived in a state of constant tension and fear." Finally, just before his sixth birthday, his worst fear came true, when his mother dumped him with the eccentric Faulk family in Monroeville: an elderly brother and his three sisters. When, if ever, would Lillie Mae come back? "Imagine a dog, watching and waiting and hoping to be taken away. That is the picture of me then." His emotional state, if not the literal circumstances that created it, is reproduced in that of the young Joel Harrison Knox in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*.

The years in Monroeville were blighted by his feelings of abandonment, but the small town, and the unchanging Faulk family, provided a stability that was sadly lacking in his earlier and subsequent life, and it is no accident that so much of his best fiction revolves around that quiet place. The Faulks loved the precocious little boy—"He is the sunshine of our home," said one of the old cousins—and he formed a strong bond with the odd Miss Sook Faulk, who was later to make an unforgettable appearance as "my friend" in "A Christmas Memory." Capote later acknowledged that it would probably have been better for him if his mother had simply let him spend the rest of his childhood there.

Lillie Mae had moved up in the world: married to a Cuban businessman, Joe Capote, she had changed her name to Nina and now lived on Park Avenue. Truman left the Faulks to become a part of the Capote household, at least on sufferance. Joe was a kind stepfather, adopting Truman and giving his name, but Nina never really loved or accepted him: she was disgusted by Truman's effeminacy, already evident in childhood, his affected manner, and his almost dwarfish stature (his adult height was

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only 5'3"), and she was evidently immune to his charm.

After Truman spent a spell at Trinity School in New York, Nina conceived the idea of sending him to military school, perhaps with the idea of making a man out him. The project proved disastrous: Truman, as might have been predicted, made irresistible sexual prey for older, rougher boys. Eventually the Capotes moved to Greenwich, Connecticut, and Truman attended the upscale Greenwich High, where he began to grow into the unconventional and decidedly attractive "character" that would soon ravish literary New York. "Truman brought happiness into our lives," remembered one Greenwich friend. "He said, 'Let's do it! Don't be afraid!' He created the fun, and if we got bored, he would come up with an idea of how we could get unbored."

Truman had too many other interests to bother with schoolwork; he failed to graduate with his class and, since the Capotes were returning to Manhattan, he was enrolled in a school that catered to students who couldn't make the grade elsewhere. That same year (1942) he took a job as a copyboy at *The New Yorker*. The magazine's editors expected their copyboys to perform their tasks silently and invisibly so that the resident geniuses could get on with their work in peace: hiring the likes of Truman, surely the least silent and invisible copyboy in *New Yorker* history was, as Gerald Clarke has said, truly an act of wartime desperation. "For God's sake! What's that?" the ultra-masculine Harold Ross demanded, catching a glimpse of Truman drifting down the hall.

He had begun writing short stories, some of which he submitted to *The New Yorker*, but they were not considered: "Very good. But romantic in a way this magazine is not," said the rejection slip. They found a warm welcome, however, at *Harper's Bazaar* and *Mademoiselle*, which, hard as it is to believe today, published some of the best and most innovative new fiction of that period. The first of Capote's stories really to make a hit was "Miriam" (1945: Capote was twenty years old), a creepy little tale about an aging spinster whose life is taken over by an evil, controlling child who just might be a projection of her own mind or soul. "Miriam" made a huge impression (at that time in New York, new short stories were as eagerly gobbled up and discussed as movies are today) but now it seems the least interesting of his early tales: his own later judgment that it was "a good stunt and nothing more" is probably correct.

But the general level of these early stories is remarkably high, and the magazines were soon avidly competing for his favors. "*Harper's* and *Mademoiselle* turned into temples which the cultist[s] entered every month with the seldom fulfilled hope that the little god would have published a new story there," recalled the critic Alfred Chester. Howard Doughty, a new friend, described the stories as showing "uncanny talent—almost frightening. He seems to have had practically no education except the back-files of the little magazines and is almost entirely unencumbered with ideas except on the practice of his art, but a mediumistic voice speaks through him in the most impeccable of accents. It's a long time since I've read anybody with such a specific gift for writing—like a musician's for music." Ideas that Capote were to articulate a decade later in his *Paris Review* interview are well illustrated by even his earliest stories: "Writing has laws of perspective," he said, "of light and shade, just as painting does, or music." He also expressed his belief that a story "can be wrecked by a faulty rhythm in a sentence—especially if it occurs toward the end—or a mistake in paragraphing, even punctuation."

At this magic moment of his life, Capote carried all before him. He was already adept at the art of publicity, to be sure, but his charm, by now legendary, was very real. It was based on an entirely original wit and eccentricity, his tiny stature and "baby seal's voice," his enveloping warmth. He had a puppyish desire for love—surely a result of his parents' emotional neglect—that most

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people found irresistible. Christopher Isherwood, meeting him at about this time, remembered that "Something happened which one wishes occurred far more often in life: I loved him immediately." Humphrey Bogart said, "At first you can't believe him, he's so odd, and then you want to carry him around with you always."

At Yaddo, where he spent several weeks during the summer of 1946 working on *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, Capote cut a swath that has never quite been equaled. As one fellow-guest recorded in his diary:

> Spontaneous when others are cautious, he has a child's directness, a child's indifference to propriety, and so gets to the heart of matters with an audacity strangers find outrageous, then delightful. Yet nothing he says or does accounts for the magnet somewhere in his makeup that exerts itself like a force beyond logic; he's responsible for turning the summer into a dance of bees. His slightest movements throughout the mansion, about the grounds, or on the side streets of Saratoga are charted and signaled by sentries visible only to one another. Schemes to share his table at dinner are laid at breakfast, sometimes by single plotters, sometimes by teams united in shamelessness. There's always laughter at his table, echoing across the moat of silence in which the tables around it are sunk.

Not everyone responded with such enthusiasm. It was back in the 1940s, for instance, that he and Gore Vidal began their lifelong feud; Vidal bitterly resented Capote's easy usurpation of a role he believed was rightfully his, that of Most Promising Young Novelist in America. ("How can you call anyone talented who's only written one book at twenty-three?" Vidal spluttered. "I've written three books, and I'm only twenty-two!") And Capote had uneasy relations with various other southern writers who jealously guarded their literary turf, as indeed he did himself. He and Carson McCullers, who had started out a close friend, soon drifted apart. Tennessee Williams forgave him for countless transgressions, even *Answered Prayers*, where he was depicted as a washed-up, squalid queen reduced to hiring call-boys to walk his dog.

Other Voices, Other Rooms was one of those books that seemed almost to write itself. "It is unusual, but occasionally it happens to almost every writer that the writing of some particular story seems outer-willed and effortless; it is as though one were a secretary transcribing the words of a voice from a cloud. The difficulty is maintaining contact with this spectral dictator." The final pages had not gone quite as smoothly as the rest, presaging a difficulty he would have with endings throughout his career. "But these last few pages!" he moaned. "Every word takes blood, I don't know why this should be, especially since I know exactly what I'm doing."

The novel's publication was almost upstaged by its jacket photo, which showed Capote, who appeared barely pubescent, lolling provocatively on a sofa like some male Lolita. Still, its reception was everything—or almost everything—he could have hoped for. Orville Prescott in *The New York Times* pronounced the young writer "gifted, dangerously gifted," and urged him to "ponder long on how he intends to use his exceptional talents."

He used them, for the next decade and more, well. Many think of Capote as having squandered his gifts, but he devoted his youth, and early middle age, to hard and sustained labor, holing up for months in quiet spots in both Europe and America to work on whatever project he was embarked upon. Jack Dunphy, with whom he joined forces in 1948, was also a writer and shared his commitment to his art.

Capote's second novel was to be a story of contemporary New York, but he dropped this project, which he had come to see as rather brittle and artificial, when old Alabama memories began to resurface. He started *The Grass Harp* in 1950 and worked on it with steady focus. "It is very real to me," he wrote to his Random House editor, Robert Linscott; "[I]t keeps me in a painful

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emotional state: memories are always breaking my heart, I cry—it is very odd, I seem to have no control over myself or what I am doing. But my vision is clear, and if I can half execute that vision it will be a beautiful book."

Communicating intense emotional states was always Capote's strong suit, and readers of *The Grass Harp* (1951) were as affected by the material as he was himself. When a Broadway producer suggested that *The Grass Harp* be turned into a play, Capote responded with an enthusiasm that eventually proved misguided. His adaptation flopped on Broadway but garnered enough enthusiasm to keep him plugging away at theater and films; over the course of the next few years, he wrote another play (a musical based on his story "House of Flowers," also a failure) and worked on the scripts for several movies. All this work was respectable and even rather good, but it proved to be a misdirection of his energies, as Linscott tried to persuade him: "It's my hunch that a talent, delicate and evocative as yours, would illuminate more deeply from the printed page than in a theater, where coarser effects are perhaps essential and where you are at the mercy of the interpreters." This was undoubtedly true, but Capote's showbiz moonlighting and the new world it revealed led him into what we now call the "new" journalism, of which he was to be one of the foremost practitioners. Two *New Yorker* pieces from this period, a profile of Marlon Brando ("The Duke in His Domain") and a long account, subsequently published in book form, describing a black American theatrical troupe's tour of the Soviet Union ("The Muses are Heard") are among the finest pieces of writing Capote ever produced.

Breakfast at Tiffany's was published in 1958. Probably the best-read and loved of all Capote's books, it strikes me as the least interesting as well, and not even original: character by character, situation by situation, it is a nearly exact imitation of Isherwood's "Sally Bowles," although no one ever mentions this fact—including Isherwood himself, who stayed more or less pals with Capote for the rest of their lives. Holly Golightly remains, however, a more synthetic creation than Sally, perhaps because while Sally was based on a real character, Holly was an idealized composite of a number of girls-about-town Capote knew, an abstraction—and an idealization, which Sally was not—rather than a human being.

In November, 1959 Capote noticed a newspaper item about the murder of the Clutter family of Garden City, Kansas. This was the beginning of a six-year creative odyssey and, ultimately, a mental and emotional ordeal. It would send Capote straight to the top of the literary heap while simultaneously upsetting his emotional equilibrium, which had never been anything but shaky.

Artistically, he knew he was doing something quite new. "Journalism," he commented, "always moves along on a horizontal plane, telling a story, while fiction—good fiction—moves vertically, taking you deeper and deeper into character and events. By treating a real event with fictional techniques . . . it's possible to make this kind of synthesis." Since then, many others have adopted this idea of the "nonfiction novel," but few have crafted it with Capote's integrity: while he performed painstaking research, meeting and corresponding with the drama's participants until every detail of the events was familiar to him, subsequent imitators have tended to treat facts as though, being "fictionalized," they are changeable and dispensable.

Capote immersed himself in the grisly material until it tainted every part of his life—the more so since he found himself powerfully identifying with one of the killers, Perry Smith. (Norman Mailer called Capote's Smith one of the great characters of American fiction, a plausible judgment.) "Every morning of my life I throw up because of the tensions created by the writing of the book," Capote said. "But it's worth it; because it's the best work I've done." While the murderers were swiftly convicted, their execution dates were postponed again and

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again as various appeals worked their way through the legal system. Capote found himself in an unhappy position; he could not finish the book until Smith and Hickock were executed, but he dreaded the actual event, and correctly: it haunted him forever, he said, like the echo in the Marabar Caves in Forster's *Passage to India*.

"Before I began [*In Cold Blood*], I was a stable person, comparatively speaking. Afterward, something happened to me. I just can't forget it, particularly the hangings at the end. Horrible!" But his demons were temporarily suppressed with the ecstatic reception of *In Cold Blood*, which in 1966 appeared in four consecutive issues of *The New Yorker*, breaking all sales records for the magazine. There had in fact been nothing like it since, over a century before, New York readers of *The Old Curiosity Shop* waited at the piers and shouted to a ship arriving from England, "Is Little Nell dead?" "My wife read each *New Yorker* as it came, tearing it out of the postman's hand," wrote one representative reader, a Lutheran minister from California. "Now we will re-read all of them; the first time we gobbled them down, glub-glub!"

Capote was the cynosure of literary New York and of worldly New York as well, when the famous black-and-white ball he threw at the Plaza late in 1966 was dubbed the party of the century. (Its guest book read "like an international list for the guillotine," joked Leo Lerman.) But the signs of instability were more evident. When *In Cold Blood* failed to win the Pulitzer Prize or the National Book Award, Capote let the snub bother him much more than he should have done—for how often have the best books ever won the big prizes?

His sense of self, always frail since the insecurities and abandonments of his childhood and further harmed by the suicide of his unloving mother in 1954—the ultimate withdrawal—began slipping dangerously. For years he had been obsessed with wealth and glamour. "Style is what you are," he said, and he appeared really to believe this. His deepest friendships, as he entered middle age, were with café-society types like Babe and Bill Paley, Lee Radziwell, and Slim Keith. Capote's confusion was nowhere more evident than in his sincere worship of these peacocks (as the dyspeptic Dunphy called them) and their values, or lack thereof, and then in his apparently unconscious attack on them in *Answered Prayers*. While he claimed that the ultra-rich led charmed lives, and certainly toadied to them as though he thought that was the case, he portrayed them in the segment of *Answered Prayers* that appeared in *Esquire* as lost souls. That he could have been unaware of this double-think—unaware even that, in writing, he had done anything to offend—shows the true degeneration of his mental state. As John O'Shea said time and again, it was not a drying-out clinic he should have been taken to when he began drinking, but a really serious psychiatric hospital. His 1984 death was probably the result of an overdose—essentially a suicide, like his mother's.

Too Brief a Treat, the new collection of Capote's letters, is a disappointment.[2] Capote turns out to have been a surprisingly mediocre letter-writer; perhaps wisely, he saved his best efforts for his fiction. One feels that his natural medium of communication was the telephone rather than the pen, and when he did write he tended to do so swiftly and carelessly and to reuse his material when he could. Another problem is that the letters in this volume are addressed to only a few recipients, a small portion of his circle of acquaintance. There are hardly any letters to Jack Dunphy and few or none to the Paleys, Lee Radziwell, Carson McCullers, Nina Capote, Joanne Carson, Christopher Isherwood, or his old pals from their teenage years—Oona O'Neill Chaplin, Gloria Vanderbilt, and Carol Marcus Saroyan Matthau.

Clarke's explanatory footnotes are mad-

2 *Too Brief a Treat: The Letters of Truman Capote*, edited by Gerald Clarke. Random House, 468 pages, $27.95.

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deningly inadequate. One is constantly running up against some intriguing item like "poor Greta [Garbo]—but a great deal of it is her own fault" or "Darling, isn't this ironic about Christopher [Isherwood]? I told you so" without any explanation whatsoever, so that the reader is continually frustrated. And yet Clarke explains other things needlessly, for example adding "[Williams]" after a reference to "Tennessee" (has there *ever* been another Tennessee?). Also, he has appended no cast of characters, which would have been easy to do and extremely useful. All of this is especially surprising in light of Clarke's previous achievement: his 1988 *Capote: A Biography* is one of the finest biographies in the last couple of decades—superbly written *and* well documented.

But while the letters will only appeal to true enthusiasts, *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and *The Complete Stories of Truman Capote* should be as widely distributed as possible. Nowadays most people know Capote only through *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *In Cold Blood*, which are fine, but Capote started out as a different type of writer who might have developed in a different, and equally exciting, way.

The appearance of Capote's early books in Modern Library editions led me to hope that his work has definitively entered the canon. This morning my hope was fulfilled when, as I strolled through my Brooklyn neighborhood, I noticed a large banner for the benefit of tourists that read: "Brooklyn Heights: Home of Truman Capote." This is fame indeed: fame, one hopes, that will outlive the mere notoriety of his final years.

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The lessons of "Lonelyhearts"

by Theodore Dalrymple

The social significance of an idea is not necessarily proportional to its truth, its coherence, or even its comprehensibility. In his introduction to a new edition of *Warrant for Genocide*, which is the history of the concoction of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a clumsy forgery that even now has a certain political resonance for the susceptible and weak-minded in an important region of the globe, Norman Cohn writes:

> It is a great mistake to suppose that the only writers who matter are those whom the educated in their saner moments can take seriously. There exists a subterranean world where pathological fantasies disguised as ideas are churned out by crooks and half-educated fanatics for the benefit of the ignorant and superstitious.

Nor, of course, is all writing concerned with communicating ideas, at least in any sense that an intellectual might recognize.

I first learned to read with attention the writings of those who had no abstract truths to express after I had read Nathanael West's novella *Miss Lonelyhearts*, which was published in 1933. Here I discovered what I, like many young men, had been too proud, snobbish, or callow hitherto to accept: that ungrammatical and ill-spelt written utterances, of very restricted vocabulary, might yet reveal the workings of the human heart, lay bare the deepest suffering, and suggest the ultimate philosophical questions. It is a lesson that I have never (I hope) entirely forgotten.

Miss Lonelyhearts, a male journalist, is the agony aunt of *The New York Post-Dispatch*. He receives letters from uneducated people asking for advice on how to cure suffering that he soon realizes is incurable—at least in the absence of a religious faith that human existence, including or especially its suffering, has a transcendent meaning and purpose. Modern man can neither believe in such a meaning and purpose, nor yet dispense with the need for that belief: this is his tragedy and his predicament, and it is a truth revealed to Miss Lonelyhearts by the letters that he receives daily. He tries nonetheless to resolve the contradiction between the impossibility of and the need for belief by involving himself, Christ-like in his own fevered imagination, in the lives of his correspondents, and is shot dead for his efforts (the title of the chapter in which he dies is "Miss Lonelyhearts Has a Religious Experience"). We live in a world in which no good deed—or compassion and good feeling—goes unpunished.

Miss Lonelyhearts explains to his fiancée, Betty, what effect the agony column has had on him.

> Let's start from the beginning. A man is hired to give advice to the readers of a newspaper. The job is a circulation stunt and the whole staff considers it a joke. He welcomes the job,

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> for it might lead to a gossip column. . . . He too considers the job a joke, but after several months at it, the joke begins to escape him. He sees that the majority of the letters are profoundly humble pleas for moral and spiritual advice, that they are inarticulate expressions of genuine suffering. He also discovers that his correspondents take him seriously. For the first time in his life, he is forced to examine the values by which he lives. This examination shows him that he is the victim of the joke and not its perpetrator.

The joke is a cosmic one, however, not a mere witticism. Why is there undeserved suffering in the world? A sixteen-year-old girl with a facial deformity, who cannot get a boyfriend like other girls, and knows that she never will be able to do so and is therefore condemned to a life of loneliness, asks:

> What did I do to deserve such a terrible bad fate? Even if I did do some bad things I didn't do any before I was a year old and I was born this way. I asked Papa and he says he doesnt know, but that maybe I did something in the other world before I was born or that maybe I was being punished for his sins.

The obvious insufficiency and intellectual absurdity of these explanations, combined with his inability to think of any others, reduces Miss Lonelyhearts to silence.

What is the purpose of life? A man who reads gas meters for a living writes to him:

> I am a cripple 41 yrs of age which I have been all my life and I have never let myself get blue until lately when I have been feeling lousy all the time on account of not getting anywhere and asking myself what it is all for. . . . What I want to no is what is it all for my pulling my god damned leg along the streets and down in stinking cellars with it all the time hurting fit to burst so that near quitting time I am crazy with the pain and when I get home all I hear is money money. . . . But that aint what I mean either because you might tell me to change my job and where could I get another one I am lucky to have one at all. It aint the job that I am complaining about but what I want to no is what the whole stinking business is for.

Miss Lonelyhearts was published at the lowest point of the Depression, but its pessimism is existential rather than economic or political. This is proved by the obvious shallowness and insincerity of Miss Lonelyhearts' replies to his correspondents.

> Life, for most of us, seems a terrible struggle of pain and heartbreak, without hope or joy. Oh, my dear readers, it only seems so. Every man, no matter how poor or humble, can teach himself to use his senses. See the cloud-flecked sky, the foam-decked sea. . . . Feel of velvet and of satin.

Or again:

> Life *is* worthwhile, for it is full of dreams and peace, gentleness and ecstasy.

His very need to italicize the word "is" proves his uncertainty, almost to the point of hysteria, about the value of life, or about its having any purpose, that might compensate for its pains. The absurdity of human desire is apparent to Miss Lonelyhearts when he sees "a man who appeared to be on the verge of death stagger into a movie theater that was showing a picture called *Blonde Beauty*." In the face of permanent oblivion, man wants a little short-lived stirring in his blood.

Miss Loneleyhearts's editor on the *Post-Dispatch* is a man called Shrike. His cynicism is a defense against the very feelings that overwhelm Miss Lonelyhearts. In a passage that brings to mind Johnson's *Rasselas*, that marvellous parable about the vanity and incompatibility of human desires, Shrike takes Miss Lonelyhearts on a tour through the possible escapes from his—from all of our—predicament. A return to the soil, lotus-eating in the South Seas, a life of pleasure, dedication to art: all sound equally ridiculous in his mouth.

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> My friend, I know of course that neither the soil, nor the South Seas, nor Hedonism, nor art, nor suicide, nor drugs, can mean anything to us. We are not men who swallow camels only to strain at stools.

West caught with precision the repetitions, the bad spelling, the lack of punctuation, the stream of suffering consciousness, the lack of awareness of any difference between the written and the spoken language, that—seventy years of compulsory education later—still characterizes the writing of a large proportion of the population when, against the grain, it puts pen to paper. Here is a suicide note that accompanied a patient to my hospital yesterday who took an overdose of tablets after having been raped by two men:

> Feeling really bad I can't get what happened last night out of my head. I still could feel them two men touching my body and just want it to go all way. I feel so dirty in what they did me and I just don't know what to do. I fell like screaming crying but I seem to not be able to I just feel so numb I want it to all go away but it wont. . . . Soon I'll be able to be at peace and I'm glad I made the choice I did I'll never have to feel this way again. . . . I don't want any treatment for it just let me be that's what I want.

Of course, life has become a little more complicated than it was in West's day. The elevated, almost celebrity status accorded to victimhood has made unselfconscious accounts such as Miss Lonelyhearts received almost impossible even for people of limited educational attainment. Self-dramatization gets in the way of simple truth. As it turned out, the writer of the suicide note had not been raped or even assaulted. When the police came to interview her, they recognized her as someone who had made several such allegations before, at different hospitals. She had withdrawn them all because they were not true. In an attempt to deflect everyone's exasperation with her, she said that she made such false allegations when she had not taken her medication properly, and she had run out of it on this occasion. Lack of medicine made her lie.

Everyone was furious with her, and she left the hospital much subdued and in disgrace. She is almost certainly in another hospital now, having made the same or similar allegations. A nuisance, a drain on society, then: but it doesn't take much imagination to understand that her existence must have been very unsatisfactory for her to behave like this. I couldn't help recalling Freud's famous dictum, as I thought about her, that the purpose of psychoanalysis was to replace neurosis by ordinary suffering.

But what was her ordinary suffering that led her to adopt such a way of being in the first place? We soon return to the existential impasse suggested by West in *Miss Lonelyhearts*. The young woman in question was physically unattractive and neither intellectually gifted nor well-educated. Culture, in the sense of anything higher than the thin gruel of popular entertainment, was almost certainly closed to her, and religion, being dead, meant nothing to her. She was unskilled and if ever she got a job she was unlikely to be much better off than if she didn't, though she would receive a burden of many responsibilities with her salary. No doubt she had emerged from a background of squalor, moral, spiritual, and physical, in which everyone behaves as a hedonist without obtaining any lasting pleasure thereby. The brief period of solicitousness that her lies about her own victimhood evoked in others, before they were exposed and the solicitousness changed to exasperation, was perhaps the best solution to the problem that she could manage. Her suicide note, therefore, revealed genuine suffering, albeit at one remove from the direct revelations of suffering vouchsafed to Miss Lonelyhearts.

Only the old now write as unselfconsciously as those who wrote to Miss Lonelyhearts. Here is a letter from a woman aged seventy complaining that her son, who took drugs, was repeatedly violent towards her.

> I have not had an easy life being widowed

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> quite young with six children to bring up. I feel the system fails people like him and he just seems to keep falling by the wayside because of his Mental Health.

Miss Lonelyhearts would have understood (and been lacerated by) the depth and intensity of the suffering implied by her words, understated and unselfdramatizing as they are.

A generation or two later, such communications require something like epigraphical interpretation to reach their true meaning. Layers of self-pity have to be scraped away before one reaches the bedrock of real suffering.

I learned an important stylistic lesson from a study I once conducted on suicide notes. To do this, I had to enter the dark bowels of the City Coroner's office, where the documents were kept. The disorder was terrible, and the light an almost pre-electric mouldering gloom. Passing between the stacks in which the dusty records were kept, in which even the spiders had mummified, I stumbled over such artifacts as an electric heater, with a label attached: Mrs Jones electrocuted in bath 23 Jan, 1951, verdict Suicide.

What I discovered is that a suicide's note is very rarely an *apologia pro vita sua*. An uncertain hand across a scrap of paper writes, as if almost too weak to continue, "I'm sorry, I can't take no more." Grand rhetorical flourishes there are none, and none of the fury in the notes of those who fully intend to be found and saved.

> I mean it this time. Mood swing my backside. You lot have done this to me. You shud lison to me When a sad I need help. This is why I dont want to be around no one belives me. Your all regret.

As Miss Lonelyhearts knew, when it comes to the true and honest expression of emotion, less is more, and vehemence is nothing.

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The memory of Donald Justice

by David Yezzi

The greatest confluence of all is that which makes up the human memory—the individual human memory. . . . The memory is a living thing—it too is in transit. But during its moment, all that is remembered joins, and lives—the old and the young, the past and the present, the living and the dead.
—Eudora Welty, *One Writer's Beginnings*

Certain moments will never change nor stop
being—
My mother's face all smiles, all wrinkles soon;
The rock wall building, built, collapsed then,
fallen;
Our upright loosening downward slowly out of
tune—
All fixed into place now, all rhyming with each
other.
—Donald Justice, "Thinking about the Past"

It has been a treacherous year for poetry, with the deaths of Thom Gunn, Czeslaw Milosz, and the American-born British poet Michael Donaghy. The news from Iowa City this past August brought further cause for dismay, as readers learned of the death, from pneumonia, of the American master Donald Justice. That same month, Justice had bequeathed to his readers a final, splendid volume of his collected poems—at once a paltry solace and an inheritance worthy of profound gratitude.[1] Long illness forced him last year to decline the opportunity to serve as U.S. Poet Laureate. And now, with Justice's passing, it is hard not to feel that a curtain has begun to descend over an eminent generation of American poets. From this uncertain vantage point at the outset of the century, one is hard pressed to imagine who might succeed them.

The poems that Justice handed down will not easily be forgotten. They compose a body of work that, though inimitable, younger writers would do well to study for its fluent musicality and gently blooming, almost ineffable melancholy. Justice's own literary lineage, as a number of critics have observed, descends from certain strains in Stevens and even, perhaps, as Michael Ryan has suggested, from Flaubert. Yet Justice was more "American," and specifically more Southern, than either of these forerunners suggests. As the poet Dana Gioia has observed, Justice was the kind of artist who confidently absorbed his influences until they were almost entirely obliterated: "Not only does one not sense any psychic wrestling with his three dominant early masters—Stevens, Baudelaire, and Auden," Gioia writes, "one also doesn't find much evidence of them in his poems outside of a few deliberate homages." And if Justice is unlike any poet that preceded him, no poet writing today is quite like him either.

Born in Miami in 1925, Justice wrote nostalgically of his Floridian childhood, a fragile moment in time and place that, to

1 *Collected Poems*, by Donald Justice; Alfred A. Knopf, 289 pages, $25.

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his dismay, he found much altered when he returned to his home state as a professor in 1982. While Florida today, ludicrously cross-gartered with strip malls and retirement communities, hardly seems part of the American South, in Justice's day Miami was, as described in his poems, cut very much from Southern cloth. "The city was not yet itself. It had/ In those days, the simplicity of dawn," as he recalls in "The Miami of Other Days."

Justice's Florida of the Thirties boasted eternal summers punctuated by sudden storms, birdsong, and the twittering of omnipresent aunts, the aromas of Cuban coffee and dusty sofas, dance lessons, and music spilling out onto the lawn from a parlor piano, the streets streaked with the endlessly lengthening shadows of evening. Or, as such mementos became for Justice in his later life, the ghostly dream of all of these, as described in "Vague Memory from Childhood":

> It was the end of day—
> Vast far clouds
> In the zenith darkening
> At the end of day.
>
> The voices of my aunts
> Sounded through an open window.
> Bird-speech cantankerous in a high tree
> mingled
> With the voices of my aunts.
>
> I was playing alone,
> Caught up in a sort of dream,
> With sticks and twigs pretending,
> Playing there alone
>
> In the dust.
> And a lamp came on indoors,
> Printing a frail gold geometry
> On the dust.
>
> Shadows came engulfing
> The great charmed sycamore.
> It was the end of day.
> *Shadows came engulfing.*

Justice's career-long innovations with repetitive forms, beautifully managed here, correspond, I think, with his perennial fascination with the workings of memory. Early sestinas and modified villanelles give way to poems like his masterly "Pantoum of the Great Depression," as well as to nonce forms that make use not only of refrains but also of the repetition of words and phrases within a line or stanza ("The clocks are sorry, the clocks are very sad./ One stops, one goes on striking the wrong hours"). Such returns, found everywhere in the poems, mimic memory as it bears the past back to the speaker in successive waves. The poems, then, work to fix these memories, however distant or vague they may be initially, by pressing them into a glittering and durable object.

Memory is Justice's great subject, engendering the nostalgia and bittersweet tonalities for which he is known. His titles alone suggest as much: "Memory of a Porch," "Homage to the Memory of Wallace Stevens," "Memories of the Depression Years," "Thinking about the Past," "In Memory of My Friend, the Bassoonist, John Lenox," "In Memory of the Unknown Poet, Robert Boardman Vaughn," "The Piano Teachers: A Memoir of the Thirties." This partial list could be expanded to include numerous other poems about childhood, family, and the South that enact similar feats of retrieval.

If Mnemosyne is mother to Justice's muse, abetting him in recalling the vanished Florida of the Depression years, then perhaps Justice's nearest kindred literary spirit is not a poet at all but a novelist and story writer also reared in the South in the early twentieth century—Eudora Welty. Prose writers and lyric poets resist easy pairing. One might identify, as Elizabeth Bishop did, a Jamesian strain in James Merrill's poems, for instance ("*liqueur de James*," she called them). Or Edwin Arlington Robinson could rightly be touted as a dab hand at situation and character, yet I would be at a loss to say which novelists he most recalls. Even the poetic side of Thomas Hardy, to my ear, did not hold extensive congress

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with that part of him that produced the novels—though both poems and prose are bound by the geography of his storied Wessex. Content on their native grounds, versifiers and fiction writers rarely tread each other's turf.

Occasionally, however, a felicitous mingling of sensibilities does occur. In the case of Merrill, Bishop writes in a letter from Samambaia dated March 1, 1955, that "the poems kept reminding me of *The Golden Bowl* (without cracks) and then just now I thought they also reminded me of James's short stories—only boiled down, or distilled. . . ." "Maybe I should leave James out of it," Bishop immediately demurs, feeling perhaps she has overstepped or been needlessly reductive.

Still, she continues: "Your imagery, however, frequently does remind me of the imagery of the later Henry James, only with a paragraph or a page or two compressed into one or two lines." The secret, of course, is in the compression; it's what saves Merrill from simply rewriting James, and the flavor retained is a peculiarly intense sensation.

If Merrill's true Penelope was James, then for Justice, who also managed a unique lyric distillation in his poems, it may well have been Welty. My hesitation in drawing the comparison, like Bishop's I suspect, derives from a fear of diminishing Justice's extraordinary achievement as a poet. It is not derivation, however, but affinity that I want to suggest. Welty's work provides a lens through which to view Justice's poems, revealing neither weakness nor fealty on Justice's part but, rather, strength and originality. (If anything, the influence of a prose writer on a poet may be more salubrious by design, avoiding the pitfalls encountered when a poet falls too fully within the gravity of another poet, as early Larkin did with Yeats or Allen Tate with T. S. Eliot.)

The index of Donald Justice's papers in the special collections department at the University of Delaware reveals a concrete connection between Justice's writing and Welty's. In 1977, Justice wrote a play, preserved in the library's holdings, adapting "Eudora Welty's short story [*sic*] 'The Golden Apples.'" A letter from Welty concerning the adaptation accompanies the typescript. Also during the Seventies (the year is unspecified), Justice produced a further bit of adaptation—taking Welty's own title "The Hitch-Hikers"—for the Reader's Theater.

Justice's connection to Welty's writing, however, goes deeper than these instances of journeywork. It may be found woven inextricably into the fabric of his poems: in his music teachers and Victrolas, in his shaded lawns, his porches and weedy lots. What's more, beyond any specific images the two writers may hold in common, Justice shares a way of seeing with Welty that can wring emotion from the visible world. A description of the light at a particular time of day, for instance, can suggest for both writers not only a powerful mood but also a compelling dramatic situation.

Reliance on natural description for the heavy lifting in poetry is extremely tricky, yet Justice succeeds again and again in poems like "Southern Gothic":

> Something of how the homing bee at dusk
> Seems to inquire, perplexed, how there can be
> No flowers here, not even withered stalks of
> flowers,
> Conjures a garden where no garden is
> And trellises too frail almost to bear
> The memory of a rose, much less a rose.
> Great oaks, more monumentally great oaks
> now
> Than ever when the living rose was new,
> Cast shade that is the more completely shade
> Upon a house of broken windows merely
> And empty nests up under broken eaves.
> No damask any more prevents the moon,
> But it unravels, peeling from a wall,
> Red roses within roses within roses.

The quietude with which Justice evokes loss here is a far cry from, say, Hardy's great poem "During Wind and Rain," which treats a similar theme more clangorously. Justice's refinement and subtlety have led certain of his critics astray; tin-eared, they

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find him too low-key and sleepy. Yet what has been said of Chekhov's plays could be said of this poem: nothing much happens, except that one world ends and another begins. Concrete objects, deftly observed and presented, convey the real subject of the poem. Both the house and the nests are empty. The homing bee inquires at an abandoned home. The roses that once adorned the garden in better days are now found only on the peeling wallpaper, an image that captures the decline of the place (and by extension, we imagine, of the former inhabitants) with fierce economy.

Welty, like Justice, possesses a resonant command of the visual, which directly informs the emotional tone of her stories; memory, for her, enters through the eye: "I found the world out there revealing, because (as with my father now) *memory* had become attached to seeing." Reminiscent of "Southern Gothic," Welty's description, in her story "June Recital" from *The Golden Apples*, makes similar use of a derelict house engulfed in shadow:

> In the shade of the vacant house, though all looked still, there was agitation. Some life stirred through. It may have been *old* life.
>
> Ever since the MacLains had moved away, the roof had stood (and leaked) over the heads of people who did not really stay, and a restless current seemed to flow dark and free around it.

Just as Justice repopulates the trellises of his abandoned house with flowers, Welty, through the eyes of a young boy named Loch, gradually repopulates the house next door with its one-time inhabitants—a girl who has snuck in to be alone with her boyfriend, and an old piano teacher, Miss Eckhart, who has come to burn the place down, beginning with the piano she used to teach on. The flowers in Justice's poem come to represent the former life of the abandoned house, just as the sound of music emanating from the house in "June Recital" awakens for Loch's sister memories of the lessons she used to attend there and of Miss Eckhart in her heyday.

To adapt Bishop's phrase, Justice's poems can read like *liqueur de Welty*. Their genius often lies in the way that they distill the trappings of memory to their most resonant and musical components. As Justice himself has written, this music, then, becomes a mnemonic device: "The emotion [in a poem] needs to be fixed," he writes in "Meters and Memory," "so that whatever has been temporarily recovered may become as nearly permanent as possible. . . . The audience is enabled [through meter and other devices] to call back the poem, or pieces of it, the poet to call back the thing itself, the subject, all that was to become the poem."

It is the concision of verse that allows us to affix it in our minds, Justice understood: (Bishop again) "a paragraph or a page or two compressed into one or two lines." But why compress? In order, Justice argues, to forestall forgetting. To create an object that will both be remembered in and of itself and that can assist the audience and the poet in the act of remembering.

As an example of Justice's ability to distill and organize his material, consider first the following passage from Welty's "Music from Spain," which depicts Eugene MacLain as he, too, recalls Miss Eckhart:

> He had even forgotten all about old Miss Eckhart in Mississippi, and the lessons he and not Ran had had on her piano, though perhaps it was natural that he should remember her now, within the aura of music. Experimentally he let down one by one the touchy, nimble fingers of his left hand on the table, then little finger and thumb see-sawed. . . . Eugene seemed to hear the extending cadence of "The Stubborn Rocking Horse," a piece of his he always liked, and could play very well. He saw the window and the yard, with the very tree. The thousands of mimosa flowers, little puffs, blue at the base like flames, seemed not to hold quite steady in this heat and light. His "Stubborn Rocking Horse" was transformed into drops of light, plopping one, two, three, four, through sky

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> and trees to earth, to lie there in the pattern opposite to the shade tree. He could feel his forehead bead with drops and the pleasure run like dripping juice through each plodding finger, at such an hour, on such a day, in such a place.

Music teachers and piano lessons crowd Justice's poems, as well. His Miss Eckharts are referred to in "The Piano Teachers: A Memoir of the Thirties" as Mrs. Snow, Mrs. L., and Mrs. K. Justice praises the iconoclasm and quiet devotion of the teachers and unlikely art lovers of his childhood, whom he refers to elsewhere as "those brave ladies who taught us/ So much of art, and stepped off to their doom." Justice's recollections of these small-town bohemians, like Welty's, seem fated and keenly aware of the losses they were forced to endure.

Now consider a couple of short passages from Justice. Where Welty uses multiple stories to elegize Miss Eckhart, Justice captures the melancholy decline of his mentors in a few lines:

> On the piano top,
> A nest of souvenirs:
> paper
> Flowers, old programs, a broken fan,
> Like a bird's broken wing.
> —And sometimes Mr. L. himself
> Comes back, recurring, like a dream.
> He brings
> Real flowers. Thin,
> Demanding, his voice soars after dark
> In the old opera between them.
> But no one sees the blows, only
> An occasional powdered bruise,
> Genteel.

And again in this passage from "Sonatina in Green":

> For them, what music? Only,
> Distantly, through some door ajar,
> Echoes, broken strains; and the garland
> Crushed at the threshold.
>
> And we,
> We few with the old instruments,
> Obstinate, sounding the one string—
> For us what music? Only, at times,
> The sunlight of late afternoon
> That plays in the corner of a room,
> Playing upon worn keys. At times,
> Smells of decaying greenery, faint bouquets—
> More than enough.

Welty's need "to hold transient life in words," as she puts it in her memoir *One Writer's Beginnings*, is matched by Justice's own need to do so in his poems. And there the comparison of the two may end. Where Welty took two pages, Justice took two lines, though both succeeded brilliantly without ever approaching the other's chosen genre. Justice wrote elegant and insightful essays and illuminating memoirs that also attempt to "hold transient life" in various ways, but his real work was always in verse. His metrical poems display, like few others in recent memory, the particular powers of traditional prosody, and his free verse is similarly formed by an impeccable ear.

Perhaps it was his craftsman's awareness of how verse, in the right hands, could produce astonishing effects that led him to stem the tide of fashion as it flowed toward prose. As Justice puts it in an interview with David Hamilton and Lowell Edwin Folsom in 1980, "I have to acknowledge that one of the afflictions of American verse at present is the prose poem, and one reason that it is an affliction instead of a salvation is that poets allow themselves all sorts of licenses regarding rhetoric, elevation, diction, and foolish ideas that they wouldn't think of allowing themselves in their so-called verse."

The affliction of prose poetry, as Justice saw it, may be merely a symptom of a wider malady to which the prevalence of free verse has led. Readers have begun to lose their ear for the verse line, without which, as Justice says, poetry might as well be prose. Perhaps the problem lies in the fact that so few poets write free verse as well as Donald Justice. But then, if truth be told, few poets write as well, period.

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New poems
by Geoffrey Brock & Dan Brown

Mezzo cammin

Today, as I jogged down the center line
of a closed-off, rain-glossed road, lost in a rhythm,
the memory of a boy returned: fifteen

or so, barefoot in faded cut-off jeans,
sprinting past neighbors' houses, tears drifting
into his ears, heart yanking at its seams—

he hoped they'd rip and didn't slow at all
for more than a mile. After crossing Mission,
the boy collapsed beneath an oak, his whole

body one cramp. (But later the secret smile,
imagining Guinness there—the clock-men stunned!)
Twenty years gone, that race so vivid still,

yet I can't for the life of me recall the gun:
who was it, or what, that made me start to run?

—*Geoffrey Brock*

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Ovid old

As a pale gauze
rose over Asia, he awoke
surrounded by, not Rome,
but huts, hanging
like tattered effigies of home
from threads of cedar smoke;

Europe was dark.
The woman by him also woke,
gently helped him to stand,
wrapped him in fur,
and led him outside by the hand
to see the sun's great yolk

push up against
the horizon's rim. After it broke
and bled into the bowl
of the Black Sea,
it rose again, transformed and whole.
For minutes, neither spoke.

"Time," he recited,
"tames the bullock to the yoke."
He laughed, more blithe than bitter,
the way he did
these days when he could find no fitter
punchline to some old joke

than himself. The woman
knew the laugh if not the joke,
the moods if not the meanings
of his strange words,
uttered aloud, to no one—keenings
that once had made him choke

with grief, but that
evolved, as Daphne's cries (a cloak
of bark abrading her body)
gave way to birdsong
in her branches. Some things no god
or Caesar can revoke.

—*Geoffrey Brock*

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Weighing light

Often the slightest gesture is most telling,
as when he reaches tenderly in passing
to pluck the yellow leaf from the dark fall

of her hair, or even the absence of all gesture:
the way she doesn't need to turn to know
who, in this gathering of friends, has touched her.

It was as if he dreamed some private garden.
Perhaps he woke from it, mid-reach, to find
his hand too near her hair in this crowded yard,

and maybe even now she's shuttering in
(she's even better than you or I at that)
a storm of worry and recrimination—

did anyone notice? how could he do that here!—
by seamlessly continuing to tell you
about her trip to see her favorite Vermeer

this morning in the Delft show at the Met:
"So now they say she isn't weighing pearls
or gold or anything—it's just the light

gleaming off empty scales." So much is hard
to know for sure. If I confronted her,
she'd say it was just a leaf—who could afford

to disagree? Could we? Now she's explaining
how the girl faces a mirror we can't see into
and how behind her hands a gloomy painting

of the Last Judgment: "Over her head God
floats in a cloud," she says, "like a thought balloon."
But you don't hear. You're watching me. I nod.

—*Geoffrey Brock*

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Though angelless

I once glanced up at a tree and found it full of angels
singing praises to God.
—Blake

If I'm to take this visionary quote
As something of a challenge (not a bad
Way of taking everything he wrote)
It isn't one I'd be exactly glad
To tackle. *Angels* thronged those wild eyes!
The realist in me would settle for
The gleam (to name a consolation prize)
Which Wordsworth was at pains to say he saw
In nature (as a kid at least), but this,
If it ever lent its lucence to my view,
Has been long since retired to the shelf.
Which doesn't mean a tree, though angelless,
Won't move me now and then to loose a few
Notes of praise from the old throat myself.

—Dan Brown

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Missing it

The thing about the old one about
The tree in the forest and nobody's around
And how it falls maybe with a sound,
Maybe not, is you throw the part out
About what there isn't or there is,
And the part of it that haunts is still there.
Still there in that the happening, the clear
Crashing there, still encompasses
Everyone condemned to missing it
By being out of the immediate
Vicinity. Out of it the way
You're out of all vicinities but one
All the time—excepting when you've gone
Out of all vicinities to stay.

—*Dan Brown*

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The media

Outraged intellectuals

by James Bowman

On the morning of the second presidential "debate" between President Bush and Senator Kerry, I woke up to the sounds of Bob Schieffer exulting on the radio. This debate, the one in town hall format from St. Louis, wasn't even the one he was to moderate a few days later, but he *just couldn't wait* until that evening's contest, he said, comparing his excitement to that which he might have felt at a heavyweight championship bout, the World Series, or the Superbowl. As a Bush supporter myself, I knew that my feelings and those of most others of my acquaintance who vote for the red-state party were rather of dread. Would our man again betray the signs of impatience and irritation at his opponent's remarks that were thought to have told so heavily against him after the first debate? Then, it seemed, he had lost his lead in the polls by pulling faces—or doing what the eagle-eyed media critics we have all become could interpret as pulling faces—while Senator Kerry was making some typically ill-natured remarks about his conduct of the war in Iraq. Was ever man so proud as is this Martius? asked the tribunes of the people. Marked you his lip and eyes? Who could doubt that, being moved, he would not spare to gird the gods?

And so as Bob Schieffer proclaimed his impatience, I was sunk in gloom. What mistake would Bush make this time? Would he, perhaps, become flustered and incoherent in response to an awkward question from the audience or—most terrifying thought of all—commit some catastrophic "gaffe" as Gerald Ford did in prematurely liberating Poland in 1976 or as Bush's father did (at least in media folklore) by looking at his watch during the town hall style debate with Bill Clinton and Ross Perot in 1992? As I recall it, I had a great deal of sympathy with the first President Bush on that occasion. Had I been in his place I would have been looking at my watch too. So would anyone less enamored than Bill Clinton of the now-obligatory charade of "caring" leadership. Did the people of the media consensus, in subsequently making so much of the significance of the act, themselves really believe that it betokened a politically culpable lack of feeling on the elder Bush's part? Or, to put it another way, did they really believe in all that Clintonian humbug about "feeling your pain"? Probably some of them did. But my guess is that most recognized the charade for what it was, without regarding it as any less legitimate as a kind of licensed obstacle course for the candidates to negotiate without falling. So you want to be president, eh? Very well then, say the media, let us see how well you can counterfeit concern for the feelings of each one of a crowd of strangers we are going to place you among for an hour and a half. If you can pass that test, you're in.

Few people even in the media could have supposed that Bush II's evident exasperation with his opponent's charges against him,

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which included dishonesty as well as gross incompetence and negligence, was a real disqualification for holding the office he holds. One who did was Jonathan Cohn of *The New Republic*, who was able confidently to assert that a mere look of annoyance "goes right to the heart of Bush's problems as president: the fact that, in general, he does not surround himself with people who present opposing views, based on everything we know from insider accounts (Suskind, Woodward, etc.)." Which, says Cohn, is "why, unlike Gore's sighs, Bush's twitches have a broader significance for the election." This, by the way, from a magazine so unanimously—and monotonously—anti-Bush that its current issue at the time of Cohn's bit of deep analysis and shining insight sported the headline "The Case against Bush: Part III." That must have had the magazine flying off the newstands!

Anyone not so committed as *The New Republic* to the cause of George Bush's early retirement might have supposed that even the most rabid of the President's detractors must by this time have been thinking: "Do I really need to hear still *more* reasons for voting against him?"

But then it was not really the case against Bush that those who hated him so were interested in so much as being reassured one more time about just how right they were to go on hating him. Richard Morin in *The Washington Post* reported on a recent study of students at Williams College by George Marcus, a professor of political science, which was said to have shown that "anger motivated them to seek out information that confirmed preexisting beliefs—their emotional state literally 'changed the way they processed information' . . . making them more likely to ignore contrary information and attack those who don't share their beliefs." This bit of research came as no surprise to those of us who had noticed that the passions excited by the election had increased as the differences between the candidates dwindled to the vanishing point. "If you're not OUTRAGED," read the supplemental bumper sticker to the Kerry/Edwards one on a car I saw recently, "you're not paying ATTENTION!" True enough, perhaps, though it didn't say paying attention to what.

Those few remaining electors who had so far avoided feelings of outrage might have begun to feel a little bit bewildered instead. Why, for instance, was so much effort being expended in "The Case against Bush: Part III" to demonstrate what, in the eyes of *New Republic* readers anyway, must have seemed the obvious? Could there have been just the shadow of a doubt lurking in the advertising or circulation departments that Bush was quite as awful—dishonest, unprincipled, corrupt, incompetent—as he was routinely represented as being in the magazine's pages? Maybe Noam Scheiber, the author of the piece, was, like Mr. Cohn and the rest of their *New Republic* colleagues, answering the people with opposing views with whom they surround themselves—though they apparently didn't think it necessary to print the opposing views for anyone else to read. It seems a little doubtful. But if we look in vain for "The Case *for* Bush: Part I," that rhetorical phantom limb, it is because there can be hardly *anyone*, certainly anyone in power, who surrounds himself with people who present opposing views—apart from John Kerry, who acts as his own opposition.

Anyone who does not suffer, as *The New Republic* does, from an advanced case of self-righteousness was more likely to take the view that presidents may be allowed their little moments of pique and irritation with the appalling criticisms they are daily subjected to, but that, as it is all a recognized part of the "debate" game not to suffer these, or to *show* that one suffers them, Bush deserved the clobbering he got in the press for doing so—and possibly to lose the election as well. Such an attitude must have arisen out of the deeply contradictory attitude of both press and public to the debates. On the one hand, everyone agrees that they are no debates at all, merely a "joint press conference" or an opportunity for both sides to spout their standard cam-

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paign speeches in quasi-dialogue form. You couldn't watch them and not acknowledge as much. On the other hand, everyone agrees not only that they are of extreme importance, that a single slip, or "gaffe," a wrong gesture or facial expression, could cost one of the candidates the election, but also that it is somehow right and proper and in accordance with the way the world ought to be that a significant proportion of the electorate—perhaps enough to decide the election—could change their votes because of such trivialities.

The media, it's true, have some excuse for learning to live with this contradiction. In their position, barred by the pretense of "objectivity" from taking a substantive approach to the campaign (apart from occasional and laughably tendentious "Fact Check" pieces), all they could do was make it into a game with themselves as umpires and wait for that glorious moment when an inadvertent word or gesture could be turned into the mini-scandal that would sink a candidature. Or a presidency. Hence the sporting metaphors in Bob Schieffer's rhapsodic aubade. Of course there was another reason for his excitement, and it was the same as my reason for gloom. His candidate—for we may safely assume that he belongs to the 90-odd percent of Washington-based journalists who back Kerry, according to John Tierney's informal survey at the Democratic convention (see "Smug self-righteousness" in the September 2004 *New Criterion*)—was widely expected once again to show to advantage against mine. The people who look forward to the Superbowl with greatest excitement are those whose teams are heavily favored to win, and Kerry's performance in the first debate had produced something like euphoria among his supporters, in the midst of which no one, to my knowledge, paused to ask whether or not such a triumph as he enjoyed on that occasion was a reasonable method for a politically mature democracy to choose its leaders.

But the debates were pretty obviously a given for the Democratic candidate, like the black vote or the media's support. If it wasn't a "gaffe" for Kerry to announce, as he did at the beginning of the second debate: "Well, let me tell you, straight up, I've never changed my mind about Iraq," then he had to be pretty well gaffe-proof. It was as hard for him to lose as it was for Bush to win. Like Professor Marcus's passionate students who were "more likely to ignore contrary information," the Kerry people both in and out of the media were clearly prepared to assume that somehow, in some nuance of a nuance of the extensive ratiocination with which Kerry had approached the question of war, as he does all other questions, and certainly in his own mind, he had been perfectly consistent. But no such benefit of the doubt would have been extended to such a contradiction by Bush.

So too when, during one of Kerry's fluctuations of opinion, he had briefly seemed to be more hawkish than Bush, "his abandoned antiwar supporters celebrate[d] the Kerry personality makeover [and] shut their eyes to Kerry's hard-line, right-wing, unilateral, pre-election policy epiphany," wrote William Safire in *The New York Times*. Those who were OUTRAGED about Bush must have been paying attention to something else at the time.

If so, it could hardly have come as a surprise. Like the Democratic voters who told the pollsters during the primaries that they had chosen Senator Kerry on the grounds not of any substantive approval of his policies or philosophies of government but on that of his "electability," they were voting not for Kerry but against Bush. And, of course, that was another reason for them not to mind if Bush were beaten by a look or a gesture or a verbal stumble in the course of a "debate" virtually devoid of substantive content.

At any rate, once you have accepted that our leaders are bound to be chosen on the most superficial basis by an almost incomprehensibly fickle and stupid electorate, it is the job not only of the candidates' handlers

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but also of all committed voters on each side to give the utmost attention to those same superficial things which might be expected to appeal to the fickle and the stupid—in fact, to assume the same character of stupidity (if not fickleness) ourselves as a gesture of solidarity with the hopeful majority. Perhaps they were thinking, as someone put it to me about midway through the fall campaign, nobody but a moron could be undecided about this election now—which means that this election will be decided by the moron vote.

Intellectuals probably believe that every election will be decided by the moron vote. That's why they are intellectuals, after all: because, knowing as they do (or think they do) all about the way the world works, their minds are already made up. This in turn means that elections are for them a matter of watching to see what the morons, who imagine that there could still be a reason to vote for the other party, will do. Moreover, in analyzing the moron psychology, like the hidden motivations of the opposition, they affirm their own status as intellectuals. This came home to me recently at a dinner party where I sat next to one of the OUTRAGED persuasion, a man who actually identified himself as an "intellectual"—no false modesty for him!—and who spent the entire meal trying to decide whether it was the mendacity or the incompetence of Bush's prosecution of the Iraq war which was the more egregious. "But why," I finally asked him, "is George Bush lying and deceiving us, as you say he is, in order to wage war in Iraq when there is no obvious electoral advantage in it—when, in fact, it may well cost him the election?"

He looked at me in a pitying sort of way, as if he thought I had just blundered into admitting my membership in the stupid party, and replied: "Because he's in the pocket of the Israelis!"

As the man was Jewish, perhaps I should have seen this coming, but he might have said any number of other things—that Bush was doing it for the oil or to increase the

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profits of his buddies at Halliburton and the Carlyle group or out of Oedipal rivalry with his father or any of a host of more exotic reasons—with the same basic meaning. For I suspect that it scarcely matters to a political intellectual what are the *real* motivations of those in power for doing what they do, so long as those motivations are hidden from the sight of the base vulgar and only accessible to advanced powers of analysis like his own. It occurred to me then that, like the conspiratorial omnivore Michael Moore, this man would probably have been just as willing to accept any or all of the alternative explanations discreditable to Bush so long as he wasn't asked to believe the one thing that has always seemed to me obvious—namely that the president is an ordinarily decent guy doing what he thinks is best for his country.

An intellectual can't believe that, of course, because it is what the stupid people believe. It would threaten his very identity as an intellectual, so much prized in this case, for him to believe only what the lumpen mass of the cognitively challenged believe.

Kerry campaign's could not be directly targeted at such people because, even though the ranks of the intellectually upwardly mobile have swollen dramatically over the last twenty or thirty years, they still do not constitute a majority. But neither was he required to disavow the support of Michael Moore and others who earnestly promoted the idea of Bush's stupidity, or of the artists and musicians led by Bruce Springsteen, a rock and roll singer much esteemed for the social significance of his soulful ballads, who were touring the country and encouraging those whose conceit of themselves as being of loftier intellect, finer artistic appreciation, superior virtue and greater sensitivity than their neighbors to vote Kerry. But in the course of the debates he did permit himself, as a kind of hint to the initiate of his eager embrace of their own feelings, one or two references to the "smarter" policies he was offering, and he managed to be magnificently patronizing to Bush's notion that a vote against the ban on partial-birth abortions meant that he was in favor of allowing these procedures to remain legal. "It's just not that simple," he claimed.

Ah, yes, it was clearly important to be reminded, if only by indirection, that this was an election pitting the party of simplicity, of black and white moral distinctions and the war upon an "axis of evil," against the party of nuance, of fine gradations on the moral grayscale and of war—or no war—undertaken according to criteria that it would take a Ph.D. in international relations to understand. It was of the latter party that Kerry was seen as being so much more appropriate as standard-bearer than an old-line Democrat like Dick Gephardt or even the more Clintonesque John Edwards. It turns out that Edwards was right to have spoken during the campaign of "Two Americas." He was just wrong on the question of who they were. The Two Americas were not rich and poor but smart and stupid, sophisticated and unsophisticated, nuanced and simple. What really lay behind Bob Schieffer's excitement and my gloom in that gray October dawn was the thought that the would-be intellectuals might at last be poised to take power.

Editor's note: Our October issue supplied incorrect publisher's information for Nicola Shulman's *Rage for Rock Gardening*. David R. Godine is the publisher of the book (128 pages, $20).

Mark Steyn's column on the theater will return next month.

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Art

Among gods and kings

by Karen Wilkin

An affectionate couple, carved out of ivory, is the first thing you see upon entering Asia Society's eclectic, idiosyncratic, and utterly absorbing exhibition "In the Realm of Gods and Kings: Arts of India: Selections from the Polsky Collections."[1] The pair is entwined in an uneasy embrace. The drilled pupils of their stylized protuberant eyes and the sleek arches of their eyebrows make them look startled. The woman stands behind the man, haunch nested into haunch, so that their torsos are united by parallel rhythms. But the figures also spiral, now inclining towards one another, now away. The woman reaches behind the man's head to touch his jeweled topknot; he swivels his upper body so that he can hold her chin—without taking his other hand off his sword. She strokes his arm. They turn to face one another, but their gazes fail to connect, so that the sculpture's slow, continuous upward movement ends with an outward swirl—animating the piece and dissipating some of its heat. As in all Indian sculptures, the voluptuous bodies seem to have been constructed from the outside in, all boneless, swelling flesh, softness, and suave surfaces. The man's belly bulges a little over his magnificent jeweled belt; carved folds of clothing emphasize the meatiness of hips and legs, both male and female. The vigorously carved patterns of opulent jewelry—earrings, necklaces, arm bands, anklets, and more—form a crisp counterpoint to the smooth convexities of robust limbs.

The formalized sexiness of the little sculpture immediately makes you assume that it depicts one of the heroically amorous couples of Hindu mythology—Sita and Rama, or Radha and Krishna. But we are told that the pair, whose origins in a seventeenth-century workshop in Madurai, south India, have been identified, are believed to be donor figures; these might be portraits. This small, powerful object is a perfect beginning to a show that celebrates the collaboration of a modern-day couple, Cynthia Hazen Polsky and Leon Polsky, in assembling a remarkable group of Indian paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, and photographs—over the course of a long, successful marriage. (That last phrase is not speculation: as teenagers, Cynthia Hazen and I were fellow students at the School of American Ballet, and I distinctly remember when I heard the thrilling news that she was getting *married*, to a glamorous older man, while the rest of us were coping with high school homework between variations and

1 "In the Realm of Gods and Kings: Arts of India: Selections from the Polsky Collections and the Metropolitan Museum of Art" opened at the New York Asia Society and Museum on September 14 and remains on view through January 2, 2005. A catalogue of the exhibition, edited by Andrew Topsfield, is available from the Asia Society (380 pages, $45).

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pointe classes.) Tellingly, Cynthia Polsky describes the ivory, labeled "A Loving Couple," as "one of our favorite pieces."

In addition to forming their personal collection, the Polskys have also been deeply involved in important acquisitions and donations of works to the Metropolitan Museum's Departments of Islamic and Indian Art, some of which are included in "In the Realm of Gods and Kings." The full ambition and scope of the Polskys' various collections can be judged from the superbly illustrated exhibition catalogue, which documents everything on view plus many additional works, with entries by a range of scholars in the field, and essays by the show's curator, Vishakha Desai, and Cynthia Polsky.

Even though the installation at Asia Society is, of necessity, less comprehensive than the handsome, informative book, there's a lot to savor. The show is a feast of notably diverse works in many media, mainly from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, with excursions earlier and later. The selection is wide ranging: from a third to fourth century A.D. Gandhara stucco relief of donor figures, in which exotic nomad dress and the echoes of Greek classicism coexist in perfect harmony, to an acutely observed chromogenic color print of sari-clad women sitting by the Ganges in the rain, made in 1967 by a contemporary Indian photographer. There's a great deal in between. To make this broad, engagingly quirky assembly coherent, the curator has divided the installation into sections with such titles as "the hunt" and "courtly life" in "the realm of kings," or "Rama" and "nature" in "the realm of gods." The borders between categories are, as they say, permeable, but putting even tenuously related images in close proximity helps to emphasize both the persistence of conventions and the innovations of individual artists.

The collection includes some first-rate sculptures, not only the ivory from Madurai that opens the exhibition and the stucco Gandhara figures, but also charming pieces such as an ivory bracket with crouching monkeys and an explosion of lush, stylized leaves. Made in south India, in the seventeenth century, it is thought to have been part of a miniature shrine or a lavishly decorated sacred chariot used in religious festivals. A high point among the sculptures is a chubby, seductive dancing Ganesha, the elephant-headed son of Shiva, god of auspicious beginnings. This wonderful sandstone object, carved a thousand years ago in north-central India, fuses rigorous geometry and sensuous form, bulbous physicality, and restrained surface embellishment. Ganesha's beefy limbs, thick trunk, and big belly collaborate to form a sinuous curve. This dominant rhythm is both reinforced and countered by low-relief patterns of jewelry and costume (including a fetching head-piece) that function like drawing across the surface of the stone.

The real strength of the collection, however, is painting. At Asia Society, the selections range from economical, stylized scenes from Hindu mythology, translated into clear-edged shapes of saffron, cinnabar, malachite, and a host of fragile pastels, to complex images of the courts of Muslim rulers—all jewel-like colors and astonishing patterns. The selection not only points up the differences between Muslim and Hindu art in India, but also raises questions about stylistic overlaps and possible cross-fertilization. What unites all the paintings, no matter what their origins—and connects them to the collection's sculpture, as well—is a pervasive sense of fluid movement, explicitly or implicitly expressed. This, Cynthia Polsky believes, is fundamental to Indian culture. She speaks of how struck she has been, on her many visits to India, with the suppleness and elegance of movement of virtually everyone. She believes, too, that her ballet training helped sharpen her perceptions of Indian art by making her aware of how bodies can move through space in a disciplined way.

Discipline and movement, along with ravishing color and eloquent drawing, are to be seen in abundance, especially, perhaps,

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in the prime courtly paintings that could serve as textbook demonstrations of how the world should be depicted according to the dictates of Islamic art. A mid-seventeenth-century Mughal miniature of a blackbuck with long, twisted horns may refer to a particular pet—the handsome creature sports necklaces and tassels—but it is first a model of a perfect animal, as conceived by Allah, rather than an imperfect individual beast. At the top of the image of the blackbuck, a band of windblown sunset clouds, evocative of Chinese sources, signals the rich heritage of the Mughal style. Another Mughal painting of a young prince and his playmates, from about 1605, treads a tightrope between anecdote and convention. Each of the running boys, like the princeling seated in the cart they pull, is charmingly individualized but not so much as to challenge the tradition of ideal, Allah-created archetypes. The crisp detail of even the most distant flowering tree and the town beyond the courtyard wall, like the high, tipped viewpoint and flattened space, are testimony, too, of the necessity of presenting images not as they are imperfectly observed by mere mortals, but as they are viewed by an omniscient deity.

A spectacular 1777 painting of a tiger hunt, by Hansraj Joshi, from Kotah, bears witness to what happened to such imported Persian painting traditions when, as in Rajasthan, they were combined with bold local styles after Muslim rule was imposed. Kotah, especially in the eighteenth century, was the ur-source of wonderful pictures in which terrible things happen to animals. The best are so good, though, that their joyous colors, superb drawing, and brilliantly syncopated compositions can reconcile even the most dedicated animal lovers to gory subject matter. In the Polskys' tiger hunt, both the rhythmic power of rows of trees with pink and blue trunks and a delectable marzipan palette persuade you to overlook the picture's implications of slaughter—the impending doom of the two tigers trapped in nets, or the malevolent intentions of the royal hunting party lurking among the trees.

Other paintings reveal evidence of the combination of other traditions. *Sultan Ibrahim Ibn Adham of Balkh Visited by Angels*, attributed to the Lucknow or Faizabad artist Hunhar (1760–70), clearly demonstrates the powerful effect of European imagery on Indian artists. The subject—the legend of an eighth-century sultan who renounced his kingdom for a life of asceticism—was apparently popular in eighteenth-century Mughal painting, but this version is set in what seems to be a stylized English landscape, rendered in fairly convincing perspective. The figures, who largely resist the diminution of scale required by full-blown Western illusionism, nonetheless seem to demonstrate the influence of far earlier, Northern Italian religious paintings (albeit with Mughal overtones). (Scholars have identified the connections between the figures in the Polskys' picture and the illustrations in a late sixteenth-century *Poor Man's Bible*, which arrived at the Mughal court in 1595.) A slender, lacquered papier-mâché penbox from Deccan or Kashmir, from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, reminds us of the complex sources and multiple overtones of Indian painting: it's "the Rococo does India," with Persian overtones. Instead of the shepherds and shepherdesses we would expect in eighteenth-century Europe, we are presented with a pair of lovers in Indian dress. An elegant young woman in Persian dress holds a branch over her head in what we are told is "a fertility pose . . . familiar from ancient Indian art," while a "European gallant," squeezed into the bottom, plays a flute to some distinctly non-European deer.

Some of the wackiest and most charming examples of this kind of thing are to be found in the collection's late paintings. Here powerful, long-entrenched Indian traditions collide with the values, both pictorial and cultural, of nineteenth-century Europe. A portrait of an official of the East India Company (from Delhi, painted about 1830–1840) shows a proper British gent in immaculate white, seated at his desk with

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his dog beneath his European-style chair. There's a suggestion of perspective, but the profile pose is as rigid as any Mughal depiction of a rajah. Pure Mughal, too, is the high viewpoint and explosively patterned floral carpet. The official himself is similarly multicultural: he wears a Scottish bonnet—no capitulation to a tropical climate here—and smokes a hookah. A marvelously detailed view of the Maharana Bhupal Singh of Mewar and his courtiers at a swimming party (painted in Udaipur, Rajasthan, about 1930–1935), presents the royal party in an elegant pavilion, set among lush, meticulously depicted trees dotted with birds. All of this is pushed to the top of the sheet, so that the cascading steps and platforms leading to a deep reservoir may be rendered in all their impressive splendor. In the water, courtiers, fish, and turtles disport themselves; two waterwheels raise chains of buckets. The picture keeps flipping between the particular and the highly conceptualized, so much so that it is not surprising to learn that scholars suspect that a photograph may have served as a model.

The sections of the show devoted to "the realm of kings" include portraits, hunting scenes, and images of courtly pleasures that are compelling for both their formal excellences and their vision of an exotic, opulent way of life. A couple of mid-nineteenth-century paintings from Udaipur, Rajasthan, of events at the court of the Maharana Sarup Singh, for example, are irresistible for their elegant balance of the geometric and the curvilinear, and their ravishing color—in one, flickers of pink against red, white, and green, sparked with gold; in the other, a patchwork of cool greens against gray and white, with telling notes of red, blue, and yellow. Their subjects are also fascinating. In one, the pink-clad Maharana on his pink divan, surrounded by his pink-clad court, inspects a superb red horse in a snappy red and white herringbone blanket. In the other, the Maharana and his courtiers, some of them mounted on white elephants and horses, all fully clothed with turbans in place, bathe in the ornamental pool of a gleaming white palace surrounded by palms and flowering shrubs. We soar above the scene to peer down into the palace, as though into an opened box, but the strict half-length profiles of the bathers shift our viewpoint, along with the scale. The geometry of the schematic architecture is transformed and enriched by the smaller scale, more irregular patterns created by figures, plants, and details of decoration.

The sections of the show devoted to "the realm of the gods" are even more wide-ranging than "the realm of kings," and because the images often deal with similar themes—scenes from Hindu mythology, such as the Ramayana or the legends of Krishna, for example—the differences between them become even more apparent. Two images of the lovers Krishna and Radha—both illustrations of episodes of the *Gita Govinda*, and both produced in Kangra, Punjab Hills, in the later part of the eighteenth century—underscore how an artist's individuality could manifest itself despite the pictorial conventions of place and period. (Not that this would have necessarily been seen as a good thing; in Muslim workshops, for example, signs of personality could be interpreted as deviations from time-honored ideals and seen as flaws.) In one small painting, the tight-pressed nude bodies of the blue-skinned god, in a fetching yellow turban, and his pale consort are locked together on a bed of leaves in "the grove" specified by the story. They are turned into a near-luminous centralized shape, framed by a couple of trees almost invisible in the darkness. In a later episode of the story—the morning after—a crowned, bejeweled Krishna in a brilliant yellow "kilt" appears next to Radha, in a salmon pink sari spangled with gold. They sit almost as close together as the rapturous pair in the erotic night scene, but the mood of the picture is very different. Rather than being subservient to the image of the lovers, as in the night scene, the light-filled, verdant landscape seems to participate in their gratification. The tautly

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curved, flat saffron and salmon shapes of Krishna and Radha's interlocked knees and thighs dominate the center of the painting—framed and echoed by the yellow-green shapes of the hills around them. A swirling gray river seems to press the pair more tightly together, while the branches of a delicately drawn tree behind Radha and a feathery willow behind Krishna reach across the crouching lovers to touch, restating the narrative content of the painting and softening the contrast between figures and ground.

The small gallery of vintage photographs toward the end of "In the Realm of Gods and Kings" serves as an illuminating footnote to the rest of the exhibition. The moody nineteenth-century prints are beautiful, with their rich, subtle tonal range and their wealth of details. At the same time, the evidence of how the camera sees makes the conventions of Indian painting, whether Hindu or Muslim, even more evident. The inclusion of color photographs by one of India's most gifted contemporary artists, Raghubir Singh, who died in 1999, is one of the exhibition's happy surprises. Cynthia Polsky believes that Singh's sensibility—his eye for pattern and color, for eloquent silhouettes, revealing details, and telling gestures—made him a modern-day heir to the best of the miniature tradition, which is why his photographs are installed with Mughal courtly art and illustrations of Hindu mythology. Given the evidence of her long and thoughtful consideration of historical Indian art at Asia Society, I'm willing to believe her. But the thesis can be tested. A retrospective of Singh's work, jointly organized by Sepia International and the Alkazi Collection of Photography will be on view in Chelsea until the end of the year. The comparisons afforded by this correspondence, whether it is by design or coincidence, enhance both exhibitions.

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Gallery chronicle

by James Panero

Like Dior, fondu, and the permanent wave, painting is back, they say. Get your paintings out of the closets, ladies, and hang them with pride. But is painting merely a fashion statement? Several new shows raise the question.

One artist who has made a go at painting, abstract painting even, is Caio Fonseca. He is now enjoying a show at Paul Kasmin and a large exhibition of recent work at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington.[1] And let's not forget the spread in *Vanity Fair*, the stunning loft on Fifth Street, the piano, the glowing reviews (many of them from *New Criterion* writers), and the relatives (father, famous sculptor; brother, famous painter; brother-in-law, Martin Amis). Then there is Fonseca's general hunkiness. In jeans and paint-splattered boots, he is a muscular throwback to those AbEx artists Tom Wolfe described in *The Painted Word*: "hot off the Carey airport bus, lined up in front of the real-estate office on Broome Street in their identical blue jeans, gum boots, and quilted Long March jackets . . . looking, of course, for the inevitable Loft."

I became directly familiar with Fonseca a year ago. My fellow critic Daniel Kunitz, who wrote the essay for Fonseca's 2003 monograph, invited me to the book party at Fonseca's loft. It seemed too good to be true: a party for a clearly successful painter who bypassed the last fifty years of art to work in an abstract mode. An able classical pianist, with a studio wired for music, Fonseca even exhibited an interest in the interplay of music and modernist form. The large shapes in his paintings, often outlined by a screen of white paint over a colorful underlayer, resemble the curves of a grand piano or notes on a staff. One of the tools he uses to mottle his canvas surfaces is piano wire. The structure of the canvas, Fonseca claims, is built up systematically from Golden Sections and the interconnection of painted forms. With their recurring shapes, the paintings have a serial appearance—and are labeled in series—but no two paintings are alike. At first glance, the paintings seem to spring forth from the handbooks of Vitruvius.

I can understand the excitement around Fonsesca's work. The Corcoran's energetic chief curator, Jacquelyn Serwer, rightly sympathizes with the plight of the contemporary painter. In her catalogue essay, she writes, "the clamor created by new-media art works, which tend to dominate current survey shows of contemporary art, often overwhelms quieter forms of expression."

I arrived in Washington with high expectations. Maybe too high. In the middle of the Corcoran show, surrounded by a riot of

1 "Inventions: Recent Paintings by Caio Fonseca" opened at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. on October 9 and remains on view through Feburary 14, 2005.
"Caio Fonseca, New Paintings" opened at Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, on October 14 and remains on view through November 13, 2004.

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squiggles, lines, and pinholes, something terrible happened. Call it a Dorian Gray moment.

Built up on words and feelings, Fonseca's paintings collapsed without them. The Palladian shapes, the so-called Apollonian construction of these paintings, the Dionysian colors that fall flat, the do-nothing pinholes posing as essential elements began to reveal a systematic fraudulence. These paintings are not architectural in their construction or musical in their tone but merely derivative. The formal elements elucidate no genuine structural qualities but only give the impression that they should.

The breaking point for me was not the large piano curves but the smaller gewgaws: chevrons and Pac-Mans recurring again and again at the edges of each painting. I came to despise them. Look how poorly these shapes are created and you realize that Caio Fonseca is a painter who either cannot paint or cannot take the time to paint well. (New Yorkers should note that the Kasmin show is more of the same, only newer—Fonseca is that static). Regardless of intentions, his work is a type of sham perpetuated by a preppy artist on an eager public. His paintings are a fashion masquerading as serious art. One doesn't emulate the painting of the 1950s by following the example of painters in the 1980s.

Speaking of fashion, Richmond Burton, another abstract painter, was on view at Cheim & Read in October.[2] His abstract paisleys are straight off the Carnaby rack via *Casino Royale*. When I saw the reproduction of one of Burton's paintings in the show's mailer (*Untitled*, 2004), I said, here is visually interesting abstraction (and more fun than Fonseca's dour gameboards). Generous swirls of white, yellow, green, blue, orange, gold, and black resemble the eyes of a peacock fan mixed with screensaver art and the morning's eggs. Like Fonseca, Burton too has an interest in classical music ("Wagner, Strauss, and Mozart" and others). Unfortunately, if you are going to take up painting, you need to learn to paint—and not from the school of Bob Ross. Runny oils, paint splatters, and cruddy lines? And this from a former architect who drafted in the offices of I. M. Pei? There are happy accidents and then there are mistakes. One reason Burton's images look better in reproduction than in real life is his avoidance, as far as I could see, of mixing paints. The results may look fine reprinted on Mama Cass's muumuu, but oil on canvas deserves more. Burton is clearly having fun, but he needs to bring us along to the party now and again.

Forget Fonseca and Burton. Want two must-see shows this fall of great painters? How about Louisa Matthíasdóttir at Scandinavia House and Giorgio Morandi at Lucas Schoormans?[3] Matthíasdóttir, who moved to New York from Iceland in 1942, studied with Hans Hoffman and spent her life refashioning her native topography (towns, hills, and family faces—her husband, the painter Leland Bell, is here) into fields of color. One day, the achievements of this other New York School—color-based, representational, and influenced most by Matisse—will be better recognized. A volume will also be devoted to its many female painters. *Self Portrait in Landscape* (1991) and *Two Riders* (*ca.* 1990–1994), both late works, are examples of Matthíasdóttir's refined geometry and sense of graduated hue. An earlier work, the sprawling *Temma on Couch, Campus View* (1966), shows her more angular and line-conscious. The austerity of Matthíasdóttir is not for everyone. Some of her portraits can be wooden, and her rooftop images of Reykjavik, frozen.

2 "Richmond Burton" was on view at Cheim & Read, New York, from September 8 through October 16, 2004.

3 "Louisa Matthíasdóttir: A Retrospective" opened at Scandinavia House, New York, on September 21 and remains on view through November 13, 2004. "Giorgio Morandi, Paintings 1950–1964" opened at Lucas Schoormans, New York, on September 24 and remains on view through December 4, 2004.

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The narrow range of subject matter both can reveal an interest in known things and a resistance to move beyond them. Like the rigidness of her self-portraits, Matthíasdóttir worked to fix her world in paint, and that was her point.

On the other side of the thermostat, but equally local in subject matter, was Giorgio Morandi, the native Bolognian and mid-century painter of bottles and tins. As Karen Wilkin wrote in these pages in January 1994, "The paintings of Giorgio Morandi, highly distilled visions of a private world, elicit only two responses: extreme enthusiasm or indifference." A show of his late work at Lucas Schoormans, all titled *Natura Morta*, gives New Yorkers a taste of Morandi in the first substantial way since the ill-suited 1981 show at the Guggenheim Museum. Taste Morandi one does, because never has paint appeared more buttery and substantive than in his strange little oeuvre. Voids become colors. Reflections become tangibles. Painter, paint, and subject matter merge in eight spectral works that look like nothing at first. A feeling informs you otherwise. Here there are no "happy accidents." There are, simply, no accidents.

Rackstraw Downes, an occasional contributor to this magazine, and one-time abstract painter, now works in a photorealistic style. Another photorealistic painter, you say? But Downes, on view at Betty Cuningham, is one photorealist who defies expectations; he has more in common with the realist landscapes of Dutch masters than with Eastman Kodak.[4] (Downes once used a camera in preparing his work. Unsuccessfully, he reports). The sophistication of Downes's technique is remarkable. But it is the selection of subject matter and the framing of multiple images that locate his work within the art of the past thirty years. Downes's take on the "situational" right-back-at-you mandate of viewership—brought to a head by minimalism's anti-objects—turns the object-viewer relationship back around through paintings of daring talent. The effects are so tangible and enjoyable that it is easy to overlook what Downes may be up to. Let it be said that he is as engaged with the minimalist Donald Judd as with the seventeenth-century Dutch landscape painter Pieter Saenredam. How's that for bedfellows?

Positioned on their own, his paintings operate as peepholes into the contemporary landscape of the local and the mundane: rows of withered plantings and looping cement pathways from Liberty State Park, New Jersey; aluminum air-conditioning ductwork tucked in the ceilings and sub-basements of the Snug Harbor Music Hall; the undersides of the Riverside Drive viaduct near 125 Street in New York; powerlines and water-flow stations near Juddland in Marfa, Texas. He captures single moments: of shadows, tire tracks, the contrails of a jet, bikers pedaling through Harlem. Like those painters from the original Haarlem, Downes negotiates an additional subject out of frame: The location of the viewer is key to both realist styles. But rather than merely eliciting the sensation of falling out of a Dutch rowboat, Downes further complicates matters by painting his scenes in series, with a slight movement of perspective in each, a turned head, a step to the side, and links his images in the most ingenious of visual ways. A cable above the water-flow monitoring installation, for example, unites an entire series. The Cuningham gallery has wisely installed these works to replicate the multiple perspectives, and, just to pique your interest, Downes has supplied his own written description of the water-flow station's activities.

Taken together, the pictures can create a storyboard for a narrative happening on our side of the canvas. But unlike minimalist art, where there is little to ponder beyond ourselves, Downes's work draws us into his intricate, interesting scenes as much as he bring us out of them. This is the first show for Betty Cuningham Gallery and it is an auspicious one—full of possibilities, fashionable always.

4 "Rackstraw Downes, New Paintings" was on view at Betty Cuningham Gallery, New York from September 23 through October 30, 2004.

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Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

The season began, and began well—all across the board. Since the below chronicle will be opera-heavy, let's touch first on some other things, starting with the New York Philharmonic. Lorin Maazel began his third season as music director there. His has been a "controversial" tenure, in that not everyone likes everything he does. But it has been a tenure of distinction and excellence (in addition to some vexation). Over the summer, the Philharmonic announced that it was extending Maazel's contract through 2008–09, when the maestro will be seventy-nine. I say, why not extend it further, if all is going well? Some conductors are just warming up as they approach eighty.

Youth-fanciers were consoled when the Philharmonic made a simultaneous announcement that it would showcase three guest conductors: Riccardo Muti, David Robertson, and Alan Gilbert. This development was thought to represent a competition: Which would be Maazel's successor? Muti, as you know, is an Italian stallion, now at La Scala. Robertson is a critic's darling, a Californian, a champion of contemporary music. Gilbert is similarly favored by critics, and he has the advantage of being the son of two Philharmonic musicians. (The feature pieces would make readers go "ah.")

Muti is already in his sixties. (Was I saying something about youth?) But Robertson is in his forties, and Gilbert his thirties. If it's youth we're lusting after, why not consider Antonio Pappano, the London-born conductor of Italian parentage who's now in charge of Covent Garden? But if it's youth we're lusting after, we don't deserve to go to concerts anyway. Used to be, gray or white hair was a welcome—and reassuring—sight before an orchestra. Are we now to count it a drawback? What a pitiful pass. In any event, Lorin Maazel is as youthful as any conductor, if it's youthfulness you want (and that is just one of the many artistic traits on which a conductor should be able to call).

Maazel began the 2004–05 season with two standard—very standard—works: the Beethoven Violin Concerto and the "New World" Symphony. The soloist in the Beethoven was Maxim Vengerov, the superb Russian violinist, who is known for charisma, but who was utterly faithful to Beethoven. (Of course, offering some charisma can be part of faithfulness to Beethoven, and to others.) In the Dvořák, Maazel indulged in some of his eccentricities—particularly of rhythm and dynamics—but this was an exciting account, reminding you of why you loved the "New World" Symphony in the first place. Or, put another way: You may be sick of this work; Maazel is not.

The next concert was even better, featuring Beethoven's Seventh Symphony—Maazel's not sick of that one, either—but also a fine performance of a Messiaen work: *Les Offrandes oubliées*. In this, Maazel succeeded by not being too mystical and profound; he

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was naturally, straightforwardly musical; the music contains the mysticism and profundity already. Also on that program was the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, with Vengerov again the soloist. He and Maazel managed to reveal new sides to this warhorse, making it run and disport like a colt.

The third concert of the season boasted Lang Lang, the pyrotechnical pianist, playing Tchaikovsky's pyrotechnical Concerto No. 1. That performance was strange, but satisfying, like a lot of Lang performances (and a lot of Maazel performances). We also had a thrilling, virtuosic performance of Bartók's *Miraculous Mandarin* Suite (to go with a dull, clumsy one of Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina* Prelude). But the curiosity on the program was a new work by Augusta Read Thomas, a Long Island native who is now composer-in-residence at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. This was *Gathering Paradise*, a collection of Dickinson settings for soprano and orchestra. The work is thoughtfully crafted, and has many points of interest. But it also suffers from monotony, which is odd for a work with so much to play with (seven poems). Maazel, the Philharmonic, and their soloist—the exquisite soprano Heidi Grant Murphy—gave a stellar performance. *Gathering Paradise* can live a hundred years and not get better treatment.

Moving to the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, it has new artistic directors this season, David Finckel and Wu Han, a cellist and pianist who are also husband and wife. (Finckel is best known as a member of the Emerson String Quartet.) They replace David Shifrin, the clarinetist who served for twelve years as artistic director. CMS's opening program was eclectic, a trademark of this society. Now and then they might throw all six Brandenburg Concertos at you, or forty-three Birtwistle polonaises (I made that last one up)—but they are usually good about giving you a variety show, which is ordinarily the most satisfying way to spend a musical evening.

The opening concert gave us Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro* for flute, clarinet, string quartet, and harp; Berlioz's song cycle *Les Nuits d'été*; Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* (his birthday present to his wife on Christmas Day 1870); and Stravinsky's *Renard*, a burlesque for a motley crew, including four dancers. Nancy Allen was the splendid harpist in the Ravel, and Jennifer Larmore lent her formidable mezzo to the Berlioz, some interpretive misjudgments aside. The Stravinsky was fun, a nice manifestation of the Chamber Music Society's eclecticism.

Finally—before we hit the opera—Carnegie Hall opened with the Philadelphia Orchestra, which is virtually its home orchestra. The Philadelphians should really leave toothbrushes there. This opening concert was a gala affair, featuring celebrity patrons in tuxedos and gowns, and two celebrities onstage: Renée Fleming and Yo-Yo Ma. The music-making was of poorer quality than the clothes.

The conductor Christoph Eschenbach—in his second season with the Philadelphia—led a sloppy, disappointing program of Richard Strauss (*Don Juan*, the *Four Last Songs*, and then another Don, *Don Quixote*). I had my usual quarrels with Eschenbach, interpretively—his pointless energy, his inattention to detail or nuance—but more worrying is this orchestra's technical condition. Before—under other conductors—you could quibble, or even anguish, over interpretation, but technique was in the bag. Judging from Eschenbach-led performances in recent months, this is no longer the case.

If it's curtains for the Philadelphia Orchestra, this is a sad, sad development, considering what that body has meant to music for about a hundred years.

Now, to the opera, starting with New York City Opera, which this season offers a most interesting lineup. It includes *La Rondine*, the Puccini opera that is one of the most underrated works in the whole repertoire. (*La Rondine* is the opera from which "Chi il bel sogno," or "Doretta's Song," is plucked.) *The Dialogues of the Carmelites*, Poulenc's masterpiece from 1953. And a new work, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, by Charles

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Wuorinen, based on a children's text by Salman Rushdie. And, oh, yes: *Cinderella*. By whom, you ask? Rossini, Massenet? No, not either of those: This is *Cinderella* by Rodgers and Hammerstein (1957).

But the first City Opera production I witnessed was of a staple, a tried-and-true friend, Verdi's *Traviata*. It never gets old, does it? (At least it shouldn't.) *La Traviata* is pretty close to a perfect opera—perfect in its every page—as even those who may have reservations about Verdi readily concede. Melody and invention simply poured out of him, and his structure is exemplary.

This production was by Renata Scotto, the retired Italian diva who was a mean Violetta (Traviata) herself. It is a production that understands the opera, thoroughly. In the spotlight was the soprano Maria Kanyova, who, despite what you might guess, was born in St. Louis. She made a wonderful Violetta, both in voice and in dramatic characterization. Hers is a vibrant, juicy instrument, right for a variety of roles, including Violetta (which is a role that itself contains great variety). Kanyova tends to sing accurately and purposefully, making every note count. Her showstopping, multifaceted aria in the first act was excellent. She seemed to be thinking it as she sang it—and she gave a boffo E flat at the end.

Her Alfredo was Robert Breault, from Menominee, Michigan, way up in the U.P. (Upper Peninsula). His voice, I would describe as pleasant, which is the word I use repeatedly about Matthew Polenzani (a tenor star at the Metropolitan Opera, who is a favorite of James Levine). As Alfredo, Breault was ardent, as one must be, but he wasn't especially Italianate. His singing was more neutral. For example, Alfredo's big aria—"De' miei bollenti spiriti"—was nice, but it was sung rather like a Rodgers and Hammerstein song. That said, I enjoyed it (as I enjoy R&H songs). And his high notes—like Kanyova's—were outstanding.

Germont was Michael Corvino, a baritone from the Bronx. He was largely graceful, if a bit glib, and a little worn. (I don't mean worn in the way Germont—the greatly troubled father—might be.) His killer aria, "Di Provenza il mar," was somewhat stilted, not expressing its full, uncanny power.

Act III was effective, with Kanyova letting out a notably bitter and despairing "E' tardi" ("It's late"). As she lay there dying, a chorus of cellphones went off in the New York State Theater, prompting a second chorus, this one of shushing and murmuring, which is always—*always*—worse. Violetta and Alfredo's final duet, "Parigi, o cara," was controlled, affecting, and beautiful. The very ending, however—as Violetta drops, and the orchestra rages at the injustice of it all—should have been far more savage. That end ought to be unbearable—and this was sadly too easy to bear.

Orchestra and chorus were competent, occasionally rising above that. The conductor, George Manahan—the music director of City Opera—was dutiful. In truth, the evening never really glowed unless Maria Kanyova had her mouth open. Fortunately, that was a lot of the time.

Another opera dominated by a soprano is *Daphne*, Strauss's Grecian jewel from 1937. When City Opera performed it in September, believe it or not, it was giving *Daphne* its New York stage premiere. This opera is a worthy item in the Strauss repertory, often linked with *Capriccio* (1941). The score is exotic, involving, and beautiful—thoroughly Straussian. Many people know it only through excerpts, recorded by such sopranos as Kiri Te Kanawa and Renée Fleming (to name only two of the more recent).

City Opera's soprano was Elizabeth Futral, a stalwart whom I have sometimes described as a "dramatic coloratura." There is not much call for coloratura in *Daphne*, but strength and lyricism are requisite, and Futral provided both. She provided rather more of the former, however. In her favor, she knew the music cold, and she made herself believable as Daphne, the targeted, tormented nymph.

The tenor Roger Honeywell, singing Leukippos, was quite good, although he was at times tight and pinched. He became

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less so as the evening progressed. Moreover, there is something very appealing about this singer, making you want to root for him. Another tenor, Robert Chafin, singing Apollo, had significant pitch problems, but he was game. Our Gaea, Ursula Ferri, was listed as a mezzo, but she sounded like a contralto—a true contralto. What a remarkable instrument. A shame it was off pitch (flat) much of the time. The baritone John Avey was Peneios, and he was a little underpowered, though it could have been that the orchestra was a little overpowered.

That orchestra was again led by George Manahan, who mainly stayed out of the way of the music, which sounds like faint praise, but which is really a tribute. And the production itself was superb: The director Stephen Lawless used ample imagination, tempered by modesty and responsibility. The set and costume designer, Ashley Martin-Davis, hit the mark. Indeed, the set (there is only one act) looked like Strauss's music itself, swirling, dreamy, protean. And the lighting—conceived by Pat Collins—served the drama exceptionally well.

A very satisfying evening at the opera. Short, too (about an hour and forty minutes).

And now for something completely different—*Platée*, by Rameau. City Opera makes a specialty of bringing us the Baroque, particularly Handel and Rameau. And *Platée* is not something you can see on just any stage.

Which may suit you fine. It is not a deathless opera, no matter how much life this company poured into it. The story is supremely strange, and I doubt my ability to sum it up neatly. Suffice it to say that this is a messy tale featuring muses, lizards, gods, goats, gators, and freak upon freak. The prologue had a motley crew hanging out at a bar (complete with Budweiser and Miller signs). (Keep in mind that this opera was written in the 1740s.) This crew looked like the Village People, of "YMCA" fame. You had a leather guy, a sailor, a fairy princess, a cop. I don't believe I saw an Indian.

There was a ton to look at in this production, with stage direction and choreography by Mark Morris and costumes by Isaac Mizrahi. These men did everything they could to dazzle—or occasionally repulse—the eye. Caterpillars (human ones) crept along logs. A character looking like Elton John ascended and descended in a type of basket. Figures of indeterminate species danced dirty. Imagine *The Secret Garden*—or some such show—gone all Mark Morris-like.

When I say that *Platée* is not deathless, I say it as a longtime champion of Rameau. I have spent years bemoaning his (relative) neglect. But this opera does not travel well, through time. City Opera's singers were decent, on the whole, and they—with the dancers—were unquestionably enthusiastic. Continual chuckles in the audience suggested that patrons appreciated *Platée*. Good for them. And good for City Opera for taking a walk on the wild side now and then, no matter what our individual reactions.

The Metropolitan Opera has been walking less wildly, but it has been turning in some excellent performances. The music director James Levine began the season with an *Otello*, and a terrific *Otello* it was: disciplined, gutsy, exciting. This is an important season for him. First, he's taking over the Boston Symphony Orchestra, giving him the kind of podium that many of us have wished for him over many years. Second, questions have been raised about his health—including by Met-orchestra musicians griping anonymously to the press. It's true that, in the last few seasons, Levine has had many sluggish, indifferent, or otherwise subpar outings. But what that has to do with health is anyone's guess.

He was crackling during that *Otello*. In a subsequent *Carmen*, however, he was much less than crackling, or precise, or feeling: He was flat, sloppy, tepid. Odd. He is a master of this score, of course, as of others, and can conduct this opera with great incisiveness and flair. Fortunately, he sort of woke up for Act IV, when he seemed at last to engage

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with the score and to be enjoying himself (and it).

Olga Borodina, too, had an off night, in the title role. She is a supreme Carmen—albeit a very Russian one—a combination of silk and smoke. Several seasons ago, her Carmen was so alluring, I said it ought to come in a brown-paper wrapper. This September, however, Borodina was strangely subdued. Where once she was mesmerizing, she was now merely interesting, if that. To add insult to injury, her vocal technique was on hiatus. I had never heard her intonation so poor. Before Act II, a Met official came to the stage to announce that "Miss Borodina [was] suffering from an allergic reaction," but would go on. She was suffering from something, that's for sure.

But she, too, came alive later on, singing with some of her customary authority and persuasiveness.

The Don José? In the season premiere, it was Neil Shicoff, but the night I attended, it was another American tenor, Richard Leech. He was virile, but he was also quite effortful. In the Flower Song, he displayed little nuance, just bulling his way through. One need not be delicate in this aria (despite its title), but one should at least be smooth. At the end of the aria, he gave no high *piano*, and in fact he had offered no *piano* of any kind.

But then, guess what? He, too, had an infinitely better fourth act, singing with new freedom, hitting the center of the notes, and emitting considerable dramatic intensity. A strange animal, a singer, and a strange medium, opera.

Hei-Kyung Hong was Micaëla, whom she portrayed with an air of tragic elegance. Her French may not qualify her for the Académie Française, but she knew what to do with her music. Escamillo was Borodina's husband, Ildar Abdrazakov, the Russian bass-baritone. He, too, cannot expect to sit in the Académie Française, but he was beautiful-voiced, accurate, and suave.

The production was Zeffirelli's, from 1996. A minute or so before curtain, the friend next to me said, "This may sound dumb, but I hope it's pretty." (She had never seen *Carmen*.) That wish wasn't dumb at all—it was right, even profound, in a way. A production of *Carmen* ought to reflect, in some fashion, the wondrous Romanticism of Bizet's score. Zeffirelli knows that, thank goodness.

But it was not a good night at the Met. A critic who had been there on an earlier night—the premiere night—told me that that performance was so bad—so bad in every particular—he even wanted to criticize the children. "And I hated the children's chorus, too!" he wanted to say. "They were awful!" But his wife said, "You can't criticize the children, for heaven's sake." And so it goes, in America the Soft.

Opera note

Don Giovanni, *Simon Boccanegra*, *Beatrice and Benedict*, *Agrippina* & *La Sonnambula*
at the Santa Fe Opera.

The Santa Fe Opera had modest beginnings in the late 1950s: open-air seating, a reflecting pool behind the orchestra pit, and the mandatory wearing of sweaters and ponchos by the audience in case the weather turned sour. Now it plays five operas to packed audiences in a covered theater of imposing dimensions, watched over from one side by the solemn, spotlit bust of Igor Stravinsky—an early champion of the company. Santa Fe's founder, John Crosby, can be said to have done more for summer opera—and for the performance of contemporary work as well as the operas of his beloved Richard Strauss—than any other American impresario. Since Crosby's death last year, the company has been in the capable hands of his longtime assistant (and founder of another opera company, in St. Louis) Richard Gaddes. This year's group of operas, though for the first time in many years (ever?) not including a contemporary work or a Strauss opera, was of uncommon

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interest—not least because the company had attracted a genuine international opera "star," Natalie Dessay, to sing Bellini's *La Sonnambula*. It's a bel canto exercise entirely foreign to Crosby's aesthetic.

It was a most successful season, with only the new production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* falling short. *Giovanni* is a difficult opera to put across, partly because of the temptation to radical but meaningless stagings, and partly because of the obvious casting problems for various vocal types. Chas Rader-Scheiber's postmodern attempt possessed little generative coherence or fire, and the cast spent most of the first act finding their way into Mozart. By the second all had relaxed, and Mozart—not the staging—became preeminent. Mariusz Kwiecien made a dynamic Giovanni, but not until the final scenes did he gather his energies into concentrated power. Of the rest of the cast, Eric Cutler sang a stylish Ottavio and Ying Huang a winning Zerlina.

Should the company have tackled a big, sprawling Verdi opera such as *Simon Boccanegra*? Yes—the entire cast responded to this uneven work with commitment and some marvelous concerted singing, not least by Mark Delavan's Simon (after a few rocky early moments) and Patricia Racette's lovely, powerful Amelia. Corrado Rovaris, the conductor, handled the Council Chamber Scene—that jewel of the score—so that it did not overbalance the two acts that followed it, as is so often the case. The minimalist staging of Stefano Vizioli only gave more prominence to the voices.

A revival of *Beatrice and Benedict*, Berlioz's opera based on *Much Ado About Nothing* (sung in English), smartly conducted by Kenneth Montgomery and staged with inventive verve by Tim Albery, boasted Eudora Brown, an apprentice artist, in the title role. Even if she could not encompass the big second-act aria, she looked and acted the part with the aplomb of a Katharine Hepburn, well partnered by her Benedict, William Burden.

Agrippina is an early Handel opera, and its story of court intrigue (mostly fictional) during Emperor Claudius's reign and the obsessive plotting of Agrippina, his wife, is well (if elaborately) set forward by the libretto of Cardinal Grimani, who knew first-hand about such things. The opera is full of the young Handel's tunes, but like so much of his work, it needs persuasive exponents—particularly for the title role, which contains three glorious vocal moments. Unfortunately, Christine Goerke was wayward of pitch for her big Act II scena "Pensieri," and her other two arias were, though well rendered, hardly dominating. Lisa Saffer sang a solid, kittenish Poppea, and Kristine Jepson an appropriately callow Nerone (a spoiled boy not yet a monster). Harry Bicket conducted with better control as the long evening of hijinks went on.

Natalie Dessay's Amina, the *sonnambula* of Bellini's opera, displayed a sure, graceful *coloratura* and a sense of exactly what she wanted to do onstage. It was an altogether powerful portrayal. Yet as fine as she was, the triumph was Bellini's. Dessay collaborated with the conductor, Evelino Pidò, and his complete understanding of the bel canto style. This made the evening far more than a star turn. Stephan Grögler, the director, made most of Dessay's neurasthenic stage deportment (Amina as Lucia's cousin) by rethinking the work in terms of a disturbed girl in a sanatorium, and tacking on an ambiguous and definitely not joyous ending. What went on visually (Dessay sloshing through water) didn't really matter, since the music was in place. Shalva Mukeria (from Russian Georgia) made a light-voiced Elvino, often confined by the staging to paddling a rowboat. Wet or dry, however, the evening was Bellini's.

—Patrick J. Smith

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Reflections

World literature in 1928

by Sarah Ruden

How all seventeen volumes of an early twentieth-century edition of the *Columbia University Course in Literature* came to Africa, eventually to appear in a Cape Town thrift shop, might be an interesting story in itself. But I have no room in my curiosity for that. I am too excitedly comparing the selections to the beginning university literature courses in my own life. I not only had my freshperson dose of Great Books at the University of Michigan, but I also taught this stuff at Harvard, at the University of Cape Town, and, most truculently, at the University of Kansas. There, one student reported in the first essay I assigned ("My Favorite Book") that his favorite book was one on the Jayhawks, because he lived for Kansas basketball—had spent the rest of the day sobbing after one loss, and joined his twin brother in trashing their dorm room in rage after another. I have long been sunk in my own psychopathology, featuring among other symptoms a delusion that the canon actually matters, so that my lust to debate what young people should read can survive any number of young people themselves. I should probably be locked up. Failing that, indulging me in a disquisition like this could keep me from much worse.

It is striking, first of all, how much university students were expected to read back then. Each volume in the *Columbia University Course* is over five hundred pages long, in small type, and the organization is not anthology-like but textbook-like. Here, for example, are the most important Russian authors; these are their most important works, but first comes a long essay on how they all fit together. The chronology is tight within the ethnic and generic sections. You were supposed to read all of these volumes straight through, as if they were a physics course with interdependent logic and applications. In the anthology we used at Kansas, my students read perhaps a hundred and fifty pages in a semester, plus a paperback novel, and whined about their busy social and professional lives. I wish I had had these tomes on hand then to shame the little weenies with images of their gaitered and pince-nez'd ancestors quietly swatting because it was the duty of pretenders to education to learn about world literature.

World literature it actually was, but without the sub-Saharan African, Oceanic, and Native American provinces. At the time, however, there were splendid excuses for that. Scholarship had so far retrieved barely anything from oral traditions. Balkan oral composition linguistics—studied in connection to Homer—forms much of the basis of the modern interest in and understanding of oral literature. That without the work of Milman Parry (whose first collecting trip was in 1933) there should have been a full admission of the world's preliterate literature into the canon by the 1920s is either a disingenuous or a not very well informed demand—especially given that most of this literature was in languages known to

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no Westerners but missionaries. Stephen Watson, a poet at the University of Cape Town young enough to have been my own colleague (and the victim of my reviewing), publishes groundbreaking popularizations of Bushman folklore. The oral literature arguably most accessible to the Columbia editors was African American, but in 1928 Zora Neale Hurston had scarcely started on her career-long project of making it known to the mainstream. (She was opposed, interestingly enough, not by white bigots but by radical black writers and their radical white patrons.)

But the editors plainly wanted to get at different experiences any way they could, and their use of the only voices and the only categorizations they knew of cannot be held against them. Colonial literature such as Kipling went under the headings of the mother countries, and postcolonial literature was an orderly queue. The United States and Canada and a few other former colonies happened already to have had a fully evolved written literature, which is represented. Australia and New Zealand appeared not to, so they didn't get a slot. There is a Latin American Literature section, but a short one, which must have been because there didn't seem to be much from Latin America *per se* yet. As Latin Americans are darker than most New Zealanders and more distinct from us in their ways of life, it would be hard to convict Columbia of literary eugenics or cultural triumphalism. On the evidence, the institution not only took literature as it came, but also made notable efforts to go after it.

The breadth of the array in these textbooks is Saharan. Volume I is called *The Wisdom of the East*. It starts with Egypt, passes through Babylonia, Assyria, ancient Israel and the early Diaspora (Yiddish literature comes later, in another volume), Arabia, Iran, India, China, and Japan. Volume VIII, *The Great Literature of Small Nations*, graciously welcomes groups as unexpected as the Finns and the "Roumanians." Personal and political criteria for the choices are not even in evidence, let alone being objectionable. The editors simply state, "It is not easy, even if possible, to say anything new about literature." Cumulative opinions are what count. There is no suggestion that a contemporary professor would have had the authority—if he first had had the daring—to oppose anything that had "become classic" in its home environment.

So here it all is. "Different epochs, different languages, and different civilizations have found varied modes of expression in literature for their reflection, emotion, and aspiration. To gather together representative selections of these is no slight or easy task, but when accomplished it matters mightily for those who, not themselves scholars or masters of several languages, are seriously bent upon reading the best that has been said and written in the world and upon bringing themselves under its influence."

So keen are the compilers on "representative selections" that a literary hierarchy is almost invisible. The Homer excerpts cover eight pages. Aesop covers five—you wouldn't think that he needed fanfaring back into Greek and Roman survey courses as a previously scorned African. Shakespeare gets his sixty-five pages, but somebody called Richard Hakluyt (1552–1616) gets his sixteen. Giving only twenty-two to Jane Austen—I wouldn't have been equal to it, and I quail at the frosty-heartedness of anyone who, merely for the sake of the science of literature, was.

I swoon at the rosy modesty of editors who even left out all of the popular, established, and rising authors of their own generation, on the pretty much self-evident theory that time had not passed its verdict on such persons and that contemporary academics were not good substitutes for time. Every last author in the final volume (*The American Tradition in Letters*) was dead at the time of this publication, and there's nobody who died after 1908. Mark Twain is absent, probably because he lived until 1910. (It is unlikely to have been because he was a humorist or an iconoclast, to judge from some other selections—if you want pom-

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posity or religious or philosophical censorship, look somewhere else than at Columbia in 1928.) But his exclusion did not mean that students were deprived of him. Literature courses at the time were to get them to read what they would not otherwise, not simply to get them to read.

It makes pedagogical sense, if you think about it. When works are chosen for us, we *should* read the dead. They do not know us, cannot maneuver to get anything from us. We can see them, in their helpless fixity, more objectively the further away they are (unless we're so abysmally dumb that Homer or Classical Arabian literature makes us fans of slavery). The instructors who set us reading a "representative selection" would have a hard time using it to sell anything in particular. When we choose our own reading, that's us reinforcing our personal tastes and beliefs, according to where life takes us. We'll naturally go for contemporary literature, but if it's ephemeral—or if it's simply garbage—what it does to us is not any educational institution's responsibility. If we've read the dead, we'll at least have a broader critical sensibility.

So how did the legend of an army of racist, sexist, classist dead white males (with their standard-bearers, the racist, sexist, classist live white males) and their heroic adversaries, the multiculturalists, come about? I have a feeling that it had something to do with soft targets. The Columbia literature faculty didn't leave any fingerprints on anti-immigration laws or lynching or other abuses of their time. Whoever at the entry of the U.S. into WWI was prancing around bonfires in Ohio, enriching them with German books, and ending a bilingual school system, it wasn't Dixon Ryan Fox, A. H. Thorndike, and company, in spite of their suspicious WASP-y names. If so, it would be hard to explain their Volume IX, *The German Mind*, with the Goethe frontispiece, a mere decade after the Armistice, exactly as if the war had never happened. In those days, in fact, you would probably have been hard put to find anyone *less* political than a literary scholar at a university. The very low-paying, very obscure profession in business-mad America would not have attracted political people.

Just to make it safer, the multiculturalists attacked the ghosts, generations later. By this time, literature professors, with the multiculturalists among them, had become "researchers" who "advanced their disciplines" and "theorists" who "broke ground" and not history- and language-grubbing, genius-worshipping scholars. Professors had often emerged as creative writers in their own right. Was imputing evil to past canons essentially another power play of the trade?

Looking through Columbia's discarded paradigm for my education, I am resentful as all get-out that I didn't get a version merely updated to include the Modernists. I've missed—practically everything. Take Heine, for example. I've read some Heine lyrics in German, but my German isn't good enough to lead me into his prose—not that I ever knew much at all about it even at second hand. At this moment I'm dandling, with envy of the youth of people now aged or dead, a translated scene from *The Harz Journey*, "The Supper on the Brocken." The two lovely and mutually infatuated young men lament Lora, who pined away gazing at the canary her now vanished lover had given her. The youths soon move off to declaim at the moonlight through a window, but are too drunk on literary rapture to realize that they have opened a large wardrobe instead. Their speeches are scarcely interrupted—changing in topic but not tone—when a prankster has shoved them in and they believe they are sprawled dying at the foot of the mountain. If only I could have relaxed and let that, instead of anything *I* could say, explain Romanticism to the Greeks, the jocks, and the stoners in my classes. But in the multiculturalist program, we've all been robbed of Heine—and Kant and Schiller—because of their nationality or ethnicity.

Give them back, you bastards! But I'm beating at a steel door, not of actual multiculturalism, as that term cannot fit what goes on in any present-day intro-lit class-

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room, but of the narrowest ideology imaginable—one that cripples us as a nation having more and more urgently to deal with the rest of the world—disguised as an inclusive one and defended with all the consequent sanctimony. The administration of the Kansas introductory literature course mandated the assignment of a couple of very recent short stories to cover the Hispanic American and African American points of view, but the message of both stories was (as far as I could see) "Other people in the world are you with darker skin. They feel exactly as you would about everything, and they do not have any problems but prejudice against their darker skin. They are partially excluded Americans. Don't you even *think* about people outside the U.S., whom you might be tempted to suspect of being deeply different in background, in beliefs, in expectations. Their literature, though they wrote it themselves about themselves, makes them *caricatures*. We must have forced them to caricature themselves or something."

In this way, every literary tradition but our own is being gradually excluded from the "multiculturalist" curriculum. How much blood would have run in the gutters had I insisted on assigning a really foreign work like—I open *Columbia* at random—Benito Peréz Galdós's tale of Rosaria following her retreating mother on her knees after confessing her elopement plans—the fainting—the cries of "Kill him!"—the shots ringing out. Oh, and here, from the *Ramayana*, is Viçvamitra's several thousand years of "unequaled self-torture" ending in a favor granted to him to prevent the destruction of all creation: that he be counted a Brahman priest. How could we expose young people to such melodrama about other cultures, solely because it's the truth?

And here's the really ironic part: "multiculturalism" is strangling off new literatures in the developing world—not in places like India, which had their own books and also instituted the old Western (and particularly the British) curriculum back when it was prestigious. These countries let our authors assist the growth of modern national literatures by amalgamation and competition. But in South Africa—one example of many—there is no prevailing indigenous literary tradition, and our classics have been for the most part not available to people of color. Into this near-vacuum came multiculturalism, holding that a combination of the indigenous and the pseudo-alien is the only proper set of cultural offerings. This does enough damage in the U.S. It's naturally a much bigger problem where there is very little of either the homey or the funky on hand. Here, what is authorized—and, as follows in the still very authoritarian Third World, what a disadvantaged person can get physical hold of and acquire the minimal training to decipher—is, as they would put it where I come from, pretty much the short end of nothing whittled down to a point. The situation asks young authors to build on nothing.

I was invited to "do something" with the Cape Town Central Library's monthly gathering of aspiring writers, to prepare them to fill a whole issue of a local journal that they have been granted. Their talent dazzles me. But they won't stand a chance as professional or even amateur writers unless they read something as a model for organizing and revising their own work. For this, their educational and ideological resources leave them nowhere to turn—and they're the lucky ones, who can at least afford the public transportation to get to a library that was decently stocked back when this was allowed.

And now I'm going to get self-righteous and say to all of those prissy curriculum planners, the original ones back home and their imitators over here: You did this. Promising to do the opposite, you've denied a future voice to the voiceless. Was it what you meant to do all along?

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Fiction chronicle

Worse yet, real life

by Max Watman

In the metaphysics of early computing, after the vacuum tubes, while the world was searching for the mouse, there came briefly to light an interesting cosmological problem. Graphical space can be described in two ways, either as a mapped set of distinct dots or as a collection of lines: bitmaps or vectors respectively. The basic metaphor upon which we would compute was at stake. We needed to construct an on-screen representation of depth and organization. Build a system of metaphors that created the illusion of space on a computer screen out of vectors, and get a certain kind of computing; do it out of pixels, and get another. It is a foundational presupposition, choose vectors and we'll end up thinking about things in a certain way, as connections, curves, and shapes; pick bitmaps, and we'll think differently, and perceive a collection of individual points. We might force shapes on our firmament, but everyone knows that constellations are just that.

Thankfully, we are removed from the essential metaphor by so many levels of user-friendly windows, prompt screens, and dialog boxes that it never need occur to anyone which presupposition won out. In fact, I'm not even sure which one really rules the machines. I suspect it was bitmaps, ultimately, and so does John Updike.

Owen Mackenzie, the collection of scenes and sentences that is at the center of Updike's latest romp into suburban infidelity—it's difficult really to call these things Updike has written "characters"—worked on a vector-based interface for computers.[1] He went to MIT, met a wife, went on to work for IBM, and ended up in a small town in Connecticut as a partner in a company called E. O. Data Management, working on a thing called DigitEyes, a light pen and touch screen interface. It was on the wrong side of things, vectors, as was Owen, its inventor. Not that it wasn't successful, it was, and Owen smart, he is, but not Bill Gates smart, and not Microsoft successful. Vectors lost. The computer screen is not a series of curves and lines; it's dots, atoms, and individuals.

At one point in the dissolution of his marriage (true to form, the marriages in Updike-urbia are all doomed), he decides not to make a telephone call because

> There were enough energies at work; things had a way of working out, like his finding his glasses that time in the dew-soaked empty lot, or his discovering, as he was devising the algorithms for DigitEyes 2.1, that no matter how many 3D transformations have been nested, one branching from the other, the last coordinate space can be specified in terms of the first, with no more than a displacement vector and three basis vectors—a mere twelve scalars to be crunched.

The first of two things remarkable about

1 *Villages*, by John Updike; Knopf, 321 pages, $25.

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this passage is that I hadn't remembered Owen wore glasses, even though I'd just spent almost 300 pages with him. He had pretended to leave some reading glasses somewhere once as a pretense to make the adultery-commencing telephone call, but other than that I can imagine no part of his face, bespectacled or otherwise. It's the kind of maddening reminder of how slight these sketches are, as people. They barely have mannerisms. I'm not suggesting that one needs graceless pages of physical description. I've never felt moored by those newspaper ledes: "Our hero, a tall man with brown hair gone gray at the temples and a sagging paunch drove home in his socio-economically significant . . ." But I don't want to be surprised by someone on page 295. Glasses? Really?

The other important thing about the above extract is that Owen, after having built a career out of vectors, had a revelation of sorts about how the vectors related to one another by their points. Although a dozen scalars sound like a cripplingly complex thing to me, I looked it up and found that scalars have magnitude, but not direction, whereas direction is the keystone of a vector. Owen's late observation of the way he's mapped out the world, in other words, is that the lines upon which he's relied are not in fact lines. The lines are rooted at points. No matter how convoluted your life gets, you can describe the last coordinate in relation to the point of origin. Not by the lines connecting the two, which would by that point have gone haywire and scrambled around one another like spaghetti (or the infidelities of a small town), but by the points themselves. The vector, atomized.

"Owen's past," Updike writes, "is like a sheet of inky blue tissue paper held up to a light, so the holes pricked in it shine: these stars are the women who let him fuck them." Of course. The points of life are sex. I breathe a sigh of relief here, because it's sex, not math, that we're talking about, and sex, at least, has been demystified by Updike novels.

Owen's pursuit of sex in *Villages* is rather unbelievable; people in these suburbs are more available, more open, and more promiscuous than anyone I can imagine outside of Updike or porno. But his sex is vivid. Astonishingly so. He caresses his sentences out to incredible lengths. Long, wonderful poetry of the body. Comparing the amount of time spent in coitus in an Updike novel to the amount of time spent on anything else is an entertainment itself. History wings by, decades flit along, and each second of sex is dwelt upon.

But it is sex had in isolation, really. Owen lives very much as his own point, unable to understand the vectors around him, or even many of the points with which he shares his life. The men of his town are "an array of golf swings."

In *Villages*, Owen's ignorance of those around him causes destruction and sadness, but it is also a problem of the book itself. Owen doesn't understand the people, or the vectors, and Updike skips all the places in between, leaving us just a series of dirty postcards. Owen alienates the world around him, and when he does find happiness, it seems unlikely to the reader. She's the same as everyone else; maybe he just gave up. Even if that surrender, that shrug that constitutes so many of life's decisions, is Updike's point, the illustration of alienation and isolation need not, in turn, alienate the reader.

In Philip Roth's latest novel, *The Plot Against America*,[2] young Roth is told by his father that "in a democracy, keeping abreast of current events was a citizen's most important duty and that you could never start too early to be informed about the news of the day." It's a patriotic civics lesson.

> "Because what's history?" he asked rhetorically when he was in his expansive dinnertime instructional mode. "History is everything that happens everywhere. Even here in Newark. Even here on Summit Avenue. Even what

2 *The Plot Against America*, by Philip Roth; Houghton Mifflin, 391 pages, $26.

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> happens in his house to an ordinary man—that'll be history too someday."

The idea that history is everything casts the net very wide, obviously, but then the father of young, fictional Phil Roth draws a smaller circle: Newark. Then a still smaller one: Summit Avenue. And still tighter: an ordinary man at home.

It's a very generous, democratic, and American way of viewing the world, and it makes me think of some kind of WPA-sponsored mural in which we're all wrapped up in the progress, all together in the march forward, from the men who shape the day, to the men who live it out. Pitch in, we're all equals, and every little bit counts. Just because you're a modest family on a nice middle-class street in Newark doesn't mean that you aren't a part of the grander thing, the March of Time.

It is the small picture at which Roth excels. The family is intimately portrayed, and every character who enters the story gets a good portrait. There are no throwaway parts in *The Plot Against America*. Everything is seamlessly, gracefully told in a series of reminiscences. All the meals, the trips, the movies, the bus rides have shades of meaning and inform the movement of the book. This is where Roth's talent shines.

An uncle enters, and Roth brings you up to speed: "My father could keep pace with Monty's prodigious expenditure of energy, and his capacity to endure all manner of hardship was no less remarkable than Monty's, but he knew from the clashes of boyhood that he was no match for the innovator who's first gambled on bringing ripe tomatoes to Newark in the wintertime by buying up carloads of green tomatoes from Cuba and ripening them in specially heated rooms on the creaky second floor of his Miller Street warehouse. When they were ready, Monty packed them four to a box, got top dollar, and was known thereafter as the Tomato King."

The specificity ("creaky second floor of his Miller Street warehouse") and the humor ("known thereafter as the Tomato King") work together with Roth's overwhelming efficiency, and by the end of two sentences one knows a lot about the brothers' relationship to each other. All of this coloration leads to an incredibly potent interplay of characters. When hearts break in *The Plot Against America,* you feel it. The sympathy evoked by Roth for his characters is astonishing.

A cousin goes off to war and comes back without a leg. He would go to the beach to bathe his stump in the ameliorating salt water, then hop out of the surf crying "'Shark! Shark!' while pointing in horror at his stump." The geeky downstairs neighbor kid is forced into a friendship with Phil based largely on proximity and seems to get younger and dumber as the book goes on and his life gets more and more sad. The aunt marries a very important rabbi, and her ambition carries her along and eventually destroys her and reduces her to madness while she hides out in the Roths' basement. Each of the characters in *The Plot Against America* could fill a book.

Which makes what befalls them all the more moving. Instead of giving the presidency to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the country elects by a landslide the heroic aviator and anti-Semite Charles Lindbergh:

> By the time I began school in 1938, Lindbergh's was a name that provoked the same sort of indignation in our house as did the weekly Sunday radio broadcasts of Father Coughlin, the Detroit-area priest who edited a right-wing weekly called *Social Justice* and whose anti-Semitic virulence aroused the passions of a sizable audience during the country's hard times.

Anti-Semitism explodes in the nation. Lindbergh makes pacts with the Axis powers. The Office of American Absorption is set up. "Under the auspices of Just Folks—described by Lindbergh's newly created Office of American Absorption as a 'volunteer work program introducing city youth to the traditional ways of the heartland life'—[Phil's] brother left on the last

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day of June 1941 for a summer 'apprenticeship' with a Kentucky tobacco farmer." The OAA moves on to the relocation of entire families soon enough. Phil goes to visit his aunt, who works at the OAA, and sees "big maps pierced with clumps of colored pins and fixed to an enormous colored bulletin board on the wall [in] back of her desk." There's a map of New Jersey, and a map of the whole nation. Aunt Evelyn tells him that "Each [pin] represents a family chosen for relocation. Now look at the map of the whole country. See all the pins there? Those represent the location to which each New Jersey family has been assigned."

So having established the intense humanity of these families, we then see them as pins on a map, a part of the political process, a part of history, but in a new, terrifying way.

History, written at the dinner table, on the avenue, in Newark. It's a horrific reversal of the American promise. But the presupposition is so big, so distracting, that it weighs the book down. The history here is glossy, a quick-moving pastiche of street games, gangsters, news broadcasts, and Winchell reports. It starts to feel like a fantasia, something cooked up. And ever present in the reader's mind is that it didn't happen this way. So rather than evoke the possibility that there might exist in America an undercurrent of ugliness, Roth simply sets up a fantasy world in which that ugliness is expressed, and then easily dismissed, because, after all, FDR was who the real America elected.

That Lindbergh would swoop into power, white scarf flying behind him, and bring into the open all of the hatred that had been submerged in America is just too tough to sell. And the care with which Roth builds his families and his characters is not evident in the building of the history contrary to fact.

The real shame is that the successful parts of the book, the intimate, are mired in this swamp of ugly fairy tale, the public. By creating a public history so far-fetched, and then failing to deliver it in any believable way, the small portraits are disconnected from the movement of the book. The intimate portraits of families and people are left to float like vignettes in a context we can never quite bring ourselves to buy.

David Foster Wallace has a better handle on the cadence, nuance, and detail of contemporary language than any writer working today. His characters are full of neuroses, motivations, and manipulations, so common and accurately evoked that you come to believe that you know them. Shortly after considering this, the average reader will find that he is very happy that he doesn't, in fact, know anyone like the characters in Wallace's stories.[3]

The narrator of "Good Old Neon," for instance, speaks in a voice that is as familiar as a ham sandwich, and Wallace submits his authorial voice to it entirely.

> Later I was in analysis, I tried analysis like almost everybody else then in their late twenties who'd made some money or had a family or whatever they thought they wanted and still didn't feel that they were happy. A lot of people I knew tried it. It didn't really work, although it did make everyone sound more aware of their own problems and added some useful vocabulary and concepts to the way we all had to talk to each other to fit in and sound a certain way. You know what I mean.

The story is a long confession of his own sense of fraudulence, narrated after his death, and culminating in a reference to "David Wallace" finding a picture of the narrator in a yearbook and wondering what could have motivated such a bright, together guy to kill himself in a car crash.

"David Wallace trying . . . to somehow reconcile what this luminous guy had seemed like from the outside with whatever on the interior must have driven him to kill himself in such a dramatic and doubtlessly painful way—with David Wallace also fully

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3 *Oblivion: Stories*, by David Foster Wallace; Little, Brown, 329 pages, $25.95

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aware that the cliché that you can't ever really know what's going on inside somebody else is hoary and insipid." Which is a nice shot at getting out of that, but no cigar: it's still a cliché. Wallace gets away with this stuff all the time. He'll observe that some pretty people aren't happy, or that some successful people are insecure, or that people don't understand how much others respect them, all of which are observations on the level of an after-school special. What masks the overworn nature of Wallace's observation are the density and cleverness that shrouds the writing.

In the story titled "Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature," nothing is made of the book by Richard Rorty of the same title. Rorty's book (1979) was a famous postmodern effort to envision philosophy without a commitment to what Rorty calls "capital T truth." Rorty's attempt to transform philosophy into a backyard chat ("continuing the conversation" he called it) was a big hit with trendy academics, and it is a measure of the book's celebrity that its title should furnish a writer like Wallace with a starting point. Not that it is easy to suss out what Wallace's stories are really about. But as in Rorty's book, every once in a while an insight or illumination shines through.

This story is about a man who must now by court order keep his collection of living Black Widow spiders in a briefcase rather than the garage, and his mother, whose face has been twisted by a cosmetic surgery mistake and now looks "insanely frightened at all times." The whole story takes place on the bus ride to the lawyer's office, where they'll be setting up the basis for the mother's malpractice suit.

The story is a mere eight pages long, yet within it, Wallace has hurled a mountain of information. Information comes at you constantly, in no particular order, and with no perceivable hierarchy. It's scattershot.

> In one or two regrettable moments on insensitivity also I have joked about taking the bus all the way through into Studio City and environs and auditioning Mother as an extra in one of the many films nowadays in which crowds of extras are paid to look upwards in terror of a *special effect* which is only later inserted into the film through computer-aided design. Which I sincerely regret, after all I'm all the support she has. To my mind however it is quite a stretch to say that an area of weakness in a twenty-year-old garage roof equals failing to exercise due diligence or care.

Robbe-Grillet tried this in his *nouveaux romans*. The authorial intent, he felt, was unknowable, and it was too despotic of the author to structure the items in a story as if some were more important than others. The smudge left by a squashed bug on a wall is as important a feature of the room in which the action takes place as the characters are. Wallace has removed the tedious descriptions of the trivial from the idea, but his MO is pretty much the same. Things, regardless of their weight, are described in detail. When the moment lends itself to this, like the moment when we suddenly realize that the briefcase is actually full of spiders (and when we realize, we realize it in all caps: OHMYGODITSFULLOFSPIDERS! is what happened in my brain) it can be remarkable. Because the information we've been receiving is disorganized, and detailed, we've come to be wading through a swamp of it, exhausted and confused. Out of that swamp rises an image, a quick flash that shimmers with vitality:

> Recently as the bus crossed Victory Boulevard as I looked down to check the status I saw accidentally protruding from one of the ventilation holes at the case's corner the slender tip of a black jointed foreleg; it was moving about slightly and possessed the same luminous coloration as the rest of the specimens, moving tentatively in an exploratory way.

This image has stayed in my mind. Images are not always as successful, and they are frequently damaged by the very techniques that create the effect.

There's a daydream I have about David Foster Wallace, in which he is sitting in a

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La-Z-Boy, and he's got a stack of owner's manuals piled up to the armrest on his right, and about half as many on his left, and he's reading through them all. Then I imagine him calling to get more. Just as Wallace takes up with incredible specificity the rhythms of our speech, he treats the world's things with excruciating attention. Every fax machine, every telephone, every microcassette recorder, and every rental car are perfectly catalogued. He's knows every button, every plastic. He knows the names of the ingredients in insecticides.

He observes very closely, and he catalogues very well. That's what makes his book *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* some of the best new journalism written. His ear for dialogue and his eye for detail make him a merciless, hilarious, and brilliant recorder of the contemporary situation. One cannot help but feel, while plowing through a story about a man who shits fully finished sculptures, that all this detail, all these products, and all these tics of contemporary speech patterns, with all the baggage of neurosis behind it, might be exactly that which we turn to fiction to escape. And that if all this achieved, ultimately, something more than "it's really hard to know what happens inside other people" it would be worth it, but without a transcendence of something, without something sublime, it's just tough going reminiscent of very hip television, or, worse yet, real life.

Far, far from any sort of real life, in a project seemingly directly at odds with the writers I've discussed above, is Cynthia Ozick. A web of narrative coincidence, poetic rapture, and quirky scholarship fills *Heir to the Glimmering World*.[4]

Young Rose, recently adrift in the world, sees an advertisement in the *Albany Star*: "Professor, arrived 1933 Berlin, children 3–14, requires assistant, relocate NYC. Respond Mitwisser, 22 Westerly."

It is 1935, and Rose is eighteen.

Professor Mitwisser studies the Karaites, an old sect of essentialist Jews who refute the Talmud, and stick to literal interpretations of the Torah. They are long-gone heretics and rebels, and no one, especially the Quakers who brought the Mitwisser clan to America, seems very interested in them.

The Mitwissers had escaped Berlin in terror. They had driven around the city in a big black limousine because "only important people would ride in an auto like that, big and black, and the driver had a black cap with a shiny beak, like a policeman." The eldest daughter tells Rosie that "all over Berlin . . . there were impromptu raids; people were being arrested right out of their own apartments, or the apartments of relatives or friends, wherever they tried to hide." They drove around the city in their best clothes, and used the bathrooms at elegant hotels, staying in motion all the while to insure escape to Sweden.

They are refugees, with a strong sense of what they've left behind: the privilege, the tradition, the mother says to her daughter of Rose, "What a pity the Fräulein cannot when she hears him recognize Goethe."

Heir to the Glimmering World is a book about absence.

Elsa Mitwisser, the mother just above, was a physicist, who tells Rosie that she worked with Schrödinger, and that her idea is at the core of the Schrödinger equation. She bit into an egg, and noticed that the bite was there, its existence proved by its absence. They invented "a wave function that extended throughout space, just as the missing outline of the bitten egg extended in principal beyond the existing body of the egg." Schrödinger's equation is used to predict the outcome of events, the distribution of results.

Absence of money, absence of homeland, absence of mind, absence of love: everyone in this book is missing something, like an egg from which a bite has been taken, and the missing is that which defines them. Their missing parts, like the imagined waveform that flows out of the egg, also

4 *Heir to the Glimmering World*, by Cynthia Ozick; Houghton Mifflin, 310 pages, $24.

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collide and define the lives of those around them.

Rosie's father, before he died while driving some of his students from their prep school to a gambling outing in Saratoga, would say to her on her birthday, "On this day, eight years ago, Jenny left me." Jenny being his wife, Rose's mother, whom he claims died in childbirth. Years later, she still remembers it. When she turns nineteen: "Nineteen years since my Jenny left me," she thinks her father might say, if he was alive.

To this cast of fragile folks, each missing something, add the Bear Boy. His father had turned him into a character in a children's book, and now he's a rich adult. Desperate, alcoholic, isolated, and flippant, but very rich. He is the benefactor of the family, he sends packets of cash. But he sends them irregularly. The absence of money is a frequent problem in the Mitwisser house; the Professor doesn't even like to leave the lights on.

Ozick writes an exquisite prose, hers is a swirl of lovely sentences that describe the gravest misfortunes I can imagine. She pulls no punches, and her evocation of sorrow and cruelty are stunning.

The daughter Anneliese won't go near a school, because one of her teachers broke two bones in her hand with a metal bar that she kept in her desk. The class was asked to name two achievements attributed to Chancellor von Bismarck and "[w]ith the short metal bar Frau Koch smashed two narrow bones. Because I gave the answer. Because I forgot I was forbidden to speak."

It makes Philip Roth's anti-Semitic fantasies look like comic books, it must be said.

The book is a swirl of domestic events: James the Bear Boy runs away with the daughter, she returns pregnant, Rose's distant cousin (and sometimes benefactor) Bertram falls on hard luck and lands at the Mitwisser house after his girlfriend Ninel is killed in the Spanish civil war. Domestic events and arrangements are tossed on the choppy waters of the world's problems again in Ozick, and in Ozick the focus is excruciatingly tight. When Rosie at one point journeys to the library in Manhattan, the space around her seems limitless. Just that she is out of the house seems to fill the book with fresh air.

In the end, the past begins to fade into the "white light of myth." The children continue their steady path towards assimilation, and we leave Rose, immeasurably grown from when we first met her, taking control and seemingly for the first time being controlled not by the absence of things, but by the presence of possibility.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

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Books

A song and a mistake

by Eric Ormsby

Just what was Ovid's crime? What offense did he commit that prompted Augustus, in 8 A.D., to banish him, for the rest of his life, to Tomis on the Black Sea? Ovid himself alludes to the cause, remarking that it was due to *carmen et error*, "a song and a mistake." Scholars have puzzled over the song, or poem, in question, as well as the error, for centuries. No doubt we'll never know precisely. But the formulation is striking. Ovid pairs song and error—a dubious couple—in the same manner in which he links the mythical characters in his *Metamorphoses*: Jove and Europa or Mars and Venus or Daedalus and Icarus. Could his phrase be merely his clever, if poignant, way of hinting, not at any one poem or misdeed, but at everything that made him Publius Ovidius Naso, the toast of Rome: successful and popular poet, *bon vivant*, and recklessly candid lover?

My *Oxford Latin Dictionary* gives six meanings for *error*. They range from "traveling on an uncertain course" to "uncertainty of mind" to "derangement" to "moral lapse," as well as to a plain old "mistake." Taken together, this constellation of meanings suggests not necessarily a single action but a way of life, a frame of mind; in other words, not "an error" but Error, a mistaken path and a wandering disposition.

Certainly the reader who ponders the question after a fresh reading, or rereading, of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* might wonder whether a literal interpretation of the phrase is warranted. For few works could possibly be farther from, or more potentially subversive of, the monolithic will and design of the Divine Augustus than this flitting, discursive, capricious, and magical poem in which nothing is ever for long what it appears to be. Mutability is its leitmotif. If Augustus's character was unbending as stone, Ovid's was as various as gossamer, and receptive to the faintest breeze. In his work, and presumably in his person, he may have embodied the antithesis of everything Augustus meant to enact and to represent. Milder despots than Augustus have been offended by less.

Ovid lacked the decorum and the gravity of his contemporaries Horace and Virgil, both imperial favorites. In addition, there was something hectic and undisciplined about his imagination; in the *Metamorphoses*, he often jumps from one topic to the next in a disconcerting way. After he has moved us with the sad tale of Icarus in Book 8, he suddenly begins discoursing on the partridge. Entertaining as this is, it can be irritating, too. True, feathers play a part in both stories, but still. It's not too hard to picture a stern imperial auditor tapping his divine toes and wondering where, if anywhere, the poem was heading.

The qualities of Ovid the poet which may have irritated Augustus, but which have delighted and charmed readers for two millennia, shine forth beautifully in the new translation of the *Metamorphoses* by the su-

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perb American poet Charles Martin.[1] Narrative speed, wit, lightness of touch, sly humor, and elegant diction—all Ovidian virtues—distinguish Martin's version. In fact, his translation reads so smoothly that it is easy at times to overlook the skill and poise of his rendition; we are caught up instead in the poem, and not distracted by the translator's artistry, which is as it should be. In the art of translation, invisibility is the surest sign of success.

Arthur Golding, perhaps the greatest English translator of the *Metamorphoses*, was certainly not above showing off or padding his lines. His 1567 version may be unsurpassed, and unsurpassable, but Golding's achievement is often at Ovid's expense. Consider his treatment of the famous opening of the work:

> Of shapes transformed to bodies straunge, I
> purpose to entreate;
> Ye gods vouchsafe (for you are they y wrought
> this wondrous feate)
> To further this mine enterprise. And from the
> world begunne,
> Graunt that my verse may to my time, his
> course directly runne
> Before the Sea and Land were made, and
> Heaven that all doth hide,
> In all the world one onely face of nature did
> abide,
> Which Chaos hight, a huge rude heape, and
> nothing else but even
> A heavie lump and clottred clod of seedes
> together driven
> Of things at strife among themselves for want
> of order due.
> No sunne as yet with lightsome beams the
> shapeless world did view.
> No Moone in growing did repayre hir hornes
> with borrowed light.
> Nor yet the earth amides the ayre did hang
> by wondrous slight
> Just peysed by hir proper weight.

This is grand, and grandly stirring ("peysed," by the way, means "weighted"). Golding has perfect command of the long line—always a problem in English verse—that nicely echoes Ovid's hexameter. Ovid, of course, doesn't rhyme, but Golding's rhymes propel the poem forward; by their sheer emphatic clangor they work to compensate for the absence of the alternating long and short syllables which Classical Latin, a quantitative language, affords its poets. Certain turns of phrase, such as "a huge rude heape" for *ruda indigestaque moles*, show how Golding draws on the English language's native strengths—here the force of monosyllables—to offset the greater vocalic complexity of the original.

Ovid has been so often translated that it would be easy to compile further comparisons with Golding; Horace Gregory, Rolfe Humphreys, and David Slavitt, to mention but American poets, have produced excellent renditions. But in all candor, in reading reviews of translations, I've always found it tedious, and rarely edifying, to pore over snippeted samples of the same passages, laid out like dead babies on autopsy slabs. Excerpts can only suggest the quality of a translation of so long a work as the *Metamorphoses*; one translator may succeed in a given passage which another translator fluffs and yet the latter's version may be better as a whole. My purpose here, in any case, is not to use Golding as a stick with which to beat Martin, or vice-versa, but to ask which version is the more truly Ovidian and why, quite apart from their intrinsic literary merits. Here's how Martin opens his *Metamorphoses*:

> My mind leads me to speak now of forms
> changed
> into new bodies: O gods above, inspire
> this undertaking (which you've changed as
> well)
> and guide my poem in its epic sweep
> from the world's beginning to the present day.
>
> Before the seas and lands had been created,

1 *Metamorphoses*, by Publius Ovidius Naso. Translated and with notes by Charles Martin; introduction by Bernard Knox. W. W. Norton, 2004; 623 pages; $35.

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before the sky that covers everything,
Nature displayed a single aspect only
throughout the cosmos; Chaos was its name,
a shapeless, unwrought mass of inert bulk
and nothing more, with the discordant seeds
of disconnected elements all heaped
together in anarchic disarray.

The sun as yet did not light up the earth,
nor did the crescent moon renew her horns,
nor was the earth suspended in midair,
balanced by her own weight, nor did the
ocean
extend her arms to the margins of the land.

At first sight Golding impresses as the more "poetic." His language is full and ornate and glorious. Martin seems flat, a bit clumsy, distinctly "unpoetic." On closer reading, however, we will find that Martin's rendering is subtler. Because he exercises restraint, he can modulate his tone and his diction more variously than Golding who always goes full-blast and at the same intense pitch. By beginning on a low note, as it were, Martin is able to build up to a formulation for chaos which is both more interesting and more intricate vocalically than Golding's "huge rude heape": "a shapeless, unwrought mass of inert bulk" captures the Latin original and tickles the palate pleasingly.

It would be absurd to compare two such disparate versions, from the sixteenth and twenty-first centuries respectively, for any other reason than to assess strategies of translation; in that regard, the wide gulf of time and convention and poetic practice that yawns between them allows us to see better than if we were to compare contemporaneous attempts.

Golding tends to whomp us over the head with his spectacular effects; for example, his "clottred clod of seeds." Martin, by contrast, comes up with the lovely phrase "discordant seeds/ of disconnected elements," which is unobtrusive but ultimately more apt, and more Ovidian, than Golding's bludgeoning tongue-twister. Notice too how Martin's version begins to sing when he reaches the passage about sun and moon. Martin doesn't attempt to duplicate Ovid's hexameter but employs a basic pattern of iambic pentameter which he subtly varies, interrupting the cadence at moments so that it hesitates or seems to stumble, then allowing it suavely to unfurl. Thus, after three regular iambic lines, he resorts to a trochee at the beginning and at the end of the line, "balanced by her own weight, nor did the ocean," which gives it an unexpected lift; the word "ocean" itself seems to crest at the rim of the verse before spilling over into "extend her arms to the margins of the land," with its ripple of assonance in "arms" and "margins."

Martin also enlivens and spices his lines with unexpected turns of phrase, as when Jove "was just about to sprinkle earth/ with thunderbolts," which strikes just the right note of menace lightly rendered (Ovid never takes the gods quite seriously, another strike against him!). Again, when the gods hold an assembly, Martin can get away with the jocular "All hell broke loose in heaven—what an uproar!" And because his register of tones is plastic and variable, when he must render one of those extended metaphors so beloved by the classic authors, he handles it with impressive deftness:

Now just as in a field the harvest stubble
Is all burned off, or as hedges are set ablaze
When, if by chance, some careless traveler
Should brush one with his torch or toss away
The still-smoldering brand at break of day—
Just so the smitten god went up in flames
Until his heart was utterly afire,
And hope sustained his unrequited passion.

This little passage points up another of Martin's inconspicuous devices that subtly complicate the texture of the translation. This is the skillful way he alternates and juxtaposes words with Latinate roots against an "Anglo-Saxon" vocabulary. The first seven lines all employ plain English words but the eighth is Latinate: "And hope sustained his unrequited passion." Such modulations not only smooth the transitions between one episode or event and

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another but also restore a just measure of balance to the passage, as though Ovid, through Martin's mediation, were tactfully drawing us back from the god's romantic immolation.

In the story of Jove and Io, all of Martin's many strengths come into play. Io, daughter of the river Inachus, has the misfortune to attract the god's attention. Io is terrified even though Jove, rather pathetically, exclaims: "I am he who hurls the roaming thunderbolt—don't run from me!" He sends down a darkening mist to confuse the girl and then has his way with her in the gloom. But meanwhile, back at Olympus, Juno notices the untimely mist and smells a rat.

> She realized
> That neither falling mist nor rising fog
> Could be the cause of this phenomenon,
> And looked about at once to find her
> husband,
> As one too well aware of the connivings
> Of a mate so often taken in the act.

Martin has Juno say, "Either I'm mad—or I am being had," which is just right for the jealous goddess. Jove at once transforms Io into "a gleaming heifer—a beauty still,/ even as a cow." The whole episode is delightfully farcical. Jove is a clumsy philanderer (Augustus would not have been amused), Juno a vengeful wife, the *femme fatale* a hapless grazer set out to pasture under the vigilance of Argus. Ovid elaborates her plight in cruel but comical terms; since she no longer has arms, she cannot stretch them out in supplication and whenever she tries to plead, she only moos. When Juno finally relents, persuaded by Jove (whose conscience is stung by Io's non-stop bovine bellowing), the metamorphosis is as magical as it is humorous:

> The goddess was now pacified, and Io
> at once began regaining her lost looks,
> till she became what she had been before;
> her body lost all of its bristling hair,
> her horns shrank down, her eyes grew
> narrower,
> her jaws contracted, arms and hands returned,
> and hooves divided themselves into nails;
> nothing remained of her bovine nature,
> unless it was the whiteness of her body.
> She had some trouble getting her legs back,
> and for a time feared speaking, lest she moo,
> and so quite timidly regained her speech.

Ovid's genius in the *Metamorphoses* lies not only in the fluid beauty of his verse but in his unparalleled ability to imagine all the minutiae of transformation. The physical details are always vivid; we seem to witness the stages of bodily change, as in those time-lapse photographs where we watch a butterfly stickily extricating itself from its chrysalis before spreading its wings. No wonder Ovid gave both delight and inspiration to later artists over the centuries, and not only poets—doesn't Ariosto hatch from Ovid's chrysalis?—but painters and sculptors too. I wouldn't even be surprised to learn that Kafka had Ovid in the back of his mind when he wrote his own *Metamorphosis*; the excruciating details of Gregor Samsa's monstrous transformation are as precise as anything to be found in the Latin poet's masterpiece.

In Book 15, Ovid introduces the pre-Socratic philosopher Pythagoras in an evident effort to underpin his extravagant imaginings with some respectable rationale. The philosopher's peroration is a bit windy and not altogether convincing. If anything, his words may have made the *Metamorphoses* more alarming than they already were to censorious readers. Thus, Pythagoras, again in Martin's version, declares:

> "Everything changes and nothing can die,
> for the spirit
> wanders wherever it wishes to, now here and
> now there,
> living with whatever body it chooses, and
> passing
> from feral to human and then back from
> human to feral,
> and at no time does it ever cease its existence;
> and just as soft wax easily takes on a
> new shape,

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unable to stay as it was or keep the same form,
and yet is still wax, I preach that the spirit
is always
the same even though it migrates to various
bodies."

A belief in metempsychosis seems to have been a feature of ancient Pythagoreanism and remained surprisingly persistent, mutating not only into various forms in Western thought but, in conjunction with Indian conceptions of reincarnation, spreading into the Islamic world, where theologians and philosophers sought to suppress it for centuries. But with regard to Ovid, whether or not he actually subscribed to such a belief, it was ideally suited for his artistic purposes. The world itself, prime matter, the stuff of living beings, was as malleable to his imagination as was the world of words in which he was a kind of secret emperor.

At the end of the *Metamorphoses*, after recounting the glorious history of Rome—itself as subject to mutability as all things under the moon—Ovid inserts the obligatory praise of Augustus, invoking the "local gods of Italy" as well as Apollo and Jove, and he entreats that

late be that day and not in our time
when he, Augustus, ruler of the world,
departs from it, and rises to the stars,
and absent, is attentive to our prayers.

Perhaps Ovid should have stopped there, with the ultimate apotheosis of Augustus. Instead he concludes with fourteen lines which might seem mere braggadocio had not time proved them true. Augustus will live forever as a god "like great Jove," but so too will Ovid, in a humbler but perhaps more significant way: "upon the people's lips."

My work is finished now: no wrath of Jove
Nor sword nor fire nor futurity
Is capable of laying waste to it.
Let that day come then, when it wishes to,
Which only has my body in its power,
And put an end to my uncertain years;
No matter, for in spirit I will be
Borne up to soar beyond the distant stars,
Immortal in the name I leave behind;
Wherever Roman governance extends
Over the subject nations of the world,
My words will be upon the people's lips,
And if there is truth in poets' prophecies,
Then in my fame forever I will live.

There is pride in these wonderful lines, as well as defiance, and not a small element of *lèse-majesté*. Ovid paid for his boast—if that was, in fact, his "song and mistake"—with ten years of banishment among rough barbarians ignorant of Latin on the Black Sea coast. He never saw Rome again—a "metamorphosis" of circumstance as cruel and as whimsical as any he could have imagined.

Ein' feste Burg

Steven Ozment
A Mighty Fortress:
A New History of the
German People.
HarperCollins, 416 pages, $26.95

reviewed by Daniel Johnson

The aftermath of the Iraq War, which occasioned an unprecedented bout of transatlantic vituperation, may seem an unpropitious moment to publish a history of the German people that leans over backwards to be generous towards its subject. But was there ever a better time? It is now, with Germany tiptoeing away from its postwar Atlanticist allegiance and openly flirting with anti-Americanism, that it is most tempting for Americans to see German history reflected in the distorting mirror of the Third Reich. The United States and Britain, nations that are still quaintly identified by their Germanic origins as "Anglo-Saxon," find it difficult to sympathize with German cousins incapable of offering at least moral support for the overthrow of a dictator whose ideology was modeled on National Socialism. The need is all the more urgent,

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therefore, for a book that explains why the Germans thought that, by opposing this war, they were being more faithful to the moral principles that their Anglo-American allies had drummed into them than the allies themselves.

Steven Ozment takes German anti-Americanism as his starting point. A German visitor to the U.S. tells him: "You Americans have more nice dumb people than any other country." This echo of prewar Teutonic condescension did indeed leave Ozment dumbfounded, but he gives the reader the benefit of his *esprit d'escalier*: "58,000,000 Americans can claim full or partial German descent." Later he recalls watching student protestors at Tübingen in 1968 daubing the university with "USA," the "S" scrawled to resemble a swastika. But he sets such ugly manifestations in the context of a "penitential" post-Nazi culture which was bound to breed resentment.

Ozment's point is that German fears, both of foreigners and of themselves, and others' fears of the Germans are mutually reinforcing. By way of introduction to his subject, he examines its historiography, concluding that historians have been "quick to typify and slow to forgive" the Germans. His own survey makes an honest attempt to restore the balance between the twelve years of the Third Reich and some 2,000 years of recorded history. Ozment thinks that the Anglozone's readiness to stereotype the Germans and our reluctance to forgive even the grandchildren of the Nazi generation explain the hostile reaction to Chancellor Schroeder's decision to side with the obstructive French and Russians on Iraq. It is quite "proper," he suggests, for a sovereign Germany to withhold support from its allies for deposing Saddam. Whether or not we agree with that decision, we should welcome it as proof of normality from a nation that is bound to become less obsequious as it regains confidence.

The Germans, he concludes, are back on course after a disastrous aberration. Rather than dwell on that failed totalitarian experiment, we should focus instead on the continuities of their history, governed by geography and characterized by conquest. The Germans, Ozment claims, are among the most cosmopolitan of peoples, borrowing from superior neighboring civilizations ever since Roman times, adapting to new circumstances with alacrity and discrimination. Freedom, equality and the rule of law were as important to the Germans as to the Americans, British, or French, but liberalism and democracy were distrusted. "Historical experience has instead left Germans more fearful of anarchy than of tyranny, inclining them to hedge, if hedge they must, on the side of good order." Ozment's Germans are not usually utopians but dualists, embracing simultaneously the intimations of divinity and the limitations of mortality.

How far one is persuaded by this argument depends on the author's ability to sustain it over a much longer period than any historian can hope to know in depth. Ozment is at his most authoritative in the early modern period he knows best, roughly from Luther to Frederick the Great. His knowledge of other periods is shallower, but even so he has produced a masterly synthesis of syntheses. The great strength of the book is its readability. One is treated as a grown-up: indeed, reading Ozment gives one an inkling of what it might be like to participate in his seminar at Harvard. It fizzes with bold hypotheses and subtle allusions, conveying a vivid sense of events unfolding, of history as what he likes to call "work in progress."

Ozment would do well to treat his own book as work in progress, too, and to correct it more carefully in the next edition. Bad enough to devote only a sentence to the Franco-Prussian War, which enabled Bismarck to unify Germany; worse to get the sequence of events back to front: "after German armies had besieged Paris, French armies surrendered at Sedan and Metz." It is the same story with the First World War: "Avoiding the Maginot Line fortifications protecting France's eastern flank, the Ger-

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mans occupied Belgium. . . ." The Maginot Line did not, of course, exist in 1914; moreover, Ozment has confused the Schlieffen Plan of that year with the Blitzkrieg of 1940. It is not the military subject matter that baffles him: back in "his" period, the descriptions of the Thirty Years' War or the Silesian wars are thorough and accurate. Unfortunately, there are similar blind spots in Ozment's political and intellectual history. Karl Marx would have been most surprised to learn that his faithful German Social Democrats were merely "the left faction" of the political wing of the bourgeoisie, the National Liberals, and that the Social Democrats were led not by his disciples Bebel and Liebknecht, but by his enemy, Eduard Lasker, whom Ozment elsewhere correctly identifies as the leader of the Liberals.

Ozment describes the philosophers Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as "major spokesmen" for the Wilhelmine period; but the former had been dead for thirty years, the latter had already been driven insane by syphilis by the time the young Kaiser ascended the throne. He goes on to assert that they "dismissed the liberal-moderate Enlightenment of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Kant, Hegel, and Goethe) as roundly as they did the German reform movement of the sixteenth (Dürer, Pirckheimer, and Luther)." In reality, while Schopenhauer did revile Hegel as a charlatan, he revered Kant and Goethe, regarding himself as the former's only true disciple, and corresponding with the latter. As for Nietzsche: true, he had little time for Kant or Hegel, but Luther and Goethe were his exemplars of human greatness, while the only work of art he owned was Dürer's etching of "Knight, Death and Devil."

Such blemishes do not undermine Ozment's scholarly authority. The richness of his chapter on the Reformation, based on a profound understanding of original sources, demonstrates the brilliance of which he is capable. Ozment has a gift for characterization. He evokes Luther, not an easy man to like, by depicting him through the eyes of colorful contemporaries such as Frederick the Wise, Dürer, and Cranach. Similarly, his nuanced portrait of Bismarck does justice to the man behind the iron chancellor's mask.

I am less sure about Ozment's Hitler, "the barbarian prince." Hitler did indeed glory in the notion that he was a barbarian, a latter-day Attila come "to rejuvenate the world," but the dark ages produced nothing comparable to the death camps. And in a country full of princes, Hitler was deliberately plebeian.

Ozment is right that the Nazis appealed to "New Age" or "existential" values. Their neo-pagan racism had supplanted the "old political and cultural Germany [that] had died on the killing fields of the nineteenth century," though it was the Kaiser's war rather than those of Napoleon or Bismarck that proved fatal. Luther's great hymn, "Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott" ("A mighty fortress is our God"), from which Ozment takes his title, is also a metaphor for the spiritual vacuum that the Nazis filled with their militarism: they almost literally worshipped Fortress Germany. But New Age (as opposed to Judeo-Christian) values were surely no less characteristic of the Weimar Republic than of the Third Reich. The Nazi goal may indeed have been "to replace a firmly principled past, which both imperial Germany and the Weimar Republic had been, with a completely experimental future," but the nihilistic modernism of Nazi ideology was carefully disguised as a restoration of tradition and authority.

Though Ozment is right to reject Nazi pretensions to be the culmination of German history, ordinary Germans were profoundly impressed by the endorsement of the new Reich by the paragons of the old one. The path from Weimar to Auschwitz led through Potsdam, where, seventy years ago, a frock-coated Hitler and his former commander on the Western front, President Hindenburg, paid homage together to the Prussian past. And once the virtues of old Germany—order, discipline, thoroughness

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—were put at the disposal of the New Age utopia, the Nazi experiment became not merely a German, but a global catastrophe. The barbarians could not have overrun the German fortress if the castellan had not handed them the key.

Ozment's treatment of the Federal Republic is full and fair, though he is perhaps just a little too impressed by communist East Germany. He is right that the survival of Lutheranism there preserved a "more positive reading of their history." That resilience has, however, curdled into a sour nostalgia which has prevented many East Germans from adapting to the reunified republic. Germany's communist legacy is just as destructive as the Nazi one, and is proving harder to disown.

It is harder to accept the "Tacitus challenge," to recount the entire history of Germany, than it is to criticize Ozment's impressive effort. With the exception of Hagen Schulze (whose excellent *Germany: A New History* appeared in English six years ago), German historians have been more reluctant than their Anglo-American colleagues to write for a wide audience. *A Mighty Fortress* is a heroic feat of scholarship, but I hope it will not be Steven Ozment's last word on the subject.

A quintessential general

Josiah Bunting III
Ulysses S. Grant.
Times Books (Henry Holt),
166 pages, $20

reviewed by Victor Davis Hanson

What are we to make of Ulysses S. Grant? At thirty-nine he was seen as a wash-out—no job, no money, forced resignation from the U.S. military after occasional drinking binges, nearly destitute with a dependent wife and four children, ex-junior officer, ex-farmer, ex-woodcutter, ex-real-estate agent, and at last, in 1860, a rumpled leather store clerk in Galena, Illinois. Historians would be hard pressed to ascertain whether Grant or Sherman was the greater prewar failure, both meeting nothing but setbacks almost in direct proportion to the degree that they continued to exhibit talent, honesty, and hard work. Yet a little less than three years later by Congressional decree Grant was appointed Lieutenant-General in command of all Union forces. A mere seven years after he left Galena, at age forty-six, Grant became the youngest elected President in the young nation's history.

If contemporaries were mystified by the sudden ascendancy of this nondescript Midwesterner without either a distinguished academic record or friends in high places, 140 years later historians are still confused in their assessments of how he pulled it off. Drunk, corrupt, butcher, slob—Grant was slurred with these epithets and still more, both now and then.

Charitable critics rejoin that Grant alone defeated Lee and so won the Civil War, tried to help Blacks and Indians, did not really profit from the rampant graft in his midst, and wrote memoirs that impressed the literati by their style and candor. Recent academic biographers are amused by Grant's clumsy ascendance into the nouveau-riche world of the Gilded Age, and how out of place this lucky bumpkin was amid sophisticated society here and abroad. Yet both detractors and admirers agree that he was otherwise in the right place at the right time, an ex-officer in need of work when what was left of the United States suddenly needed thousands of military men of any background, age, and ability—with a premium on any who had graduated from West Point (even if he might have finished twenty-first in a class of thirty-nine).

Josiah Bunting III in his new engaging biography—written for Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s "The American Presidents" series—rejects much of such conventional wisdom, both pro and con, in making the case that Grant's rise was both logical and understandable, given his innate talents and proven discipline. Indeed, to Bunting, his ac-

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complishments are so legion as a great captain, a two-term president, an astute protector of Blacks and Indians, a man of humble and generous temperament, and a masterful writer that we need to reassess all the old appellations like "average," or "mediocre," and instead appreciate Grant as the truly great man he was.

In his revisionist efforts Bunting—himself a combat veteran, officer, and superintendent emeritus of the Virginia Military Institute—looks at a variety of criteria often ignored by the professors and journalists who so often write our biographies. Military leadership is not an easy thing in itself, but Grant was more than either a supreme commander or combat leader, but rather both and still more. He was a Patton and an Eisenhower all in one, stalking the front lines under fire and issuing his famous crisp, laconic orders to division commanders, even while as a grand military vizier he telegraphed orders over a continent-sized theater to Sherman, Thomas, and Sheridan confronting Confederate forces nearly two thousand miles distant.

As far as innate intelligence goes, very early on, Grant proved to be a gifted student of engineering. Despite his so-so aggregate record at West Point, a few thought he could have eventually become a professor of mathematics. Surely his later grasp of logistics reflects both a quick mind and West Point training. He may have been the best horseman in the U.S. army office corps. Bunting compares his unique equestrian talent to "horse-whispering," an almost uncanny understanding of the effects of noise, hearing, and emotions upon animals, an extra sense that would serve him equally well with people.

Bunting also reminds us that the shy and nondescript Lieutenant Grant was often courageous in the Mexican War (which he later condemned as "one of the most unjust wars ever waged by a stronger nation against a weaker one"), as evidenced by hair-raising but little discussed exploits where his imagination and horse-mastery saved his life. And by the time Grant was drilling the Illinois state militia—after a series of embarrassing job rebuffs from well-entrenched mediocrities in the War Department—he was probably the most capable young officer in the North.

So how did Grant accept the fact that despite his wide travel, education, combat experience, and job history at almost forty he had earned little more than scorn and rumor? Bunting implies that for all his insecurities, there was a certain serenity in Grant, a sort of philosophical acceptance that merit was often trumped by fate and luck: do your best and hope your excellence is recognized, although there is a good chance that it might not be.

What made him a great general? The campaigns to take Forts Henry and Donelson were inspired; the capture of Vicksburg was beyond the powers of any contemporary Northern general save Grant. But it was not just know-how that made Grant singular. As Bunting rightly notes, "Grant understood that his predecessors in command in the East had failed not because of inferior tactical brains but because they lacked, simply, will." And he adds of Grant's bulldog tenacity—quoting Thucydides—that "quiet obduracy in a leader is equally formidable."

All his predecessor supreme commanders that tried to crash the Army of the Potomac on through to Richmond—Irwin McDowell, George McClellan (in two terms), John Pope, Ambrose Burnside, and Joseph Hooker—were sickened at the ensuing terrible arithmetic of thousands of combat dead. None quite understood that the tragic price of victory in the new industrial-age war was often unprecedented casualties ("not war, but murder" an officer remarked of Cold Harbor), nor that the purpose of the Union army was not necessarily the possession of enemy territory or even the capture of Richmond, but the destruction of the Army of Northern Virginia.

This was a frightening task that would require backbone when reports flooded in about what Lee's sharpshooters could do to

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thousands charging fixed positions. In the face of it all, Grant reiterated, "I propose to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer" and "there will be no turning back"—the first general to take to heart Lincoln's continual harangue about Lee that "Wherever the enemy goes, let our troops go also."

Bunting cites, but perhaps does not quite give full credit to, Grant's rare military superior and subordinate, Lincoln and Sherman. Both in some ways made him what he was. Lincoln gave him complete trust, and more importantly a preexisting strategic blueprint of Winfield Scott's so-called Anaconda Plan that directed Union forces to blockade the Southern coast and squeeze the Confederacy from the west, north, south as well as Grant's east. Sherman may have sounded wild and crazy, but he too was an authentic American genius the likes of which this country has rarely seen since. If Grant chewed up Lee, Sherman rampaged through the very heart of the enemy's heartland, thus eroding the enemy's economic, social, and psychological ability to resist. And just as Sherman could march 600 miles freely because Grant stuck to Lee, so Grant could cling to Lee's shrinking army because the latter's entire country was falling apart to his rear.

The first Grant presidential term was relatively successful. Southerners remembered Appomattox and realized that a moderate Midwesterner who was magnanimous to the defeated was about the best that they could hope for after the unbalanced Andrew Johnson, who hated Secessionists as much as he did new Black citizens. Radicals in turn saw Grant as a sort of proto-Wesley Clark, the liberal's tool whose war record and reputation for no-nonsense command might provide cover and then force for their own revolutionary ideas about punishing and reconstituting the South.

When Grant took office he ran the country like he did the Army of the Potomac, delegating authority with the expectation that subordinates would not be heard from again since they would obviously take the initiative and need little further guidance. But unfortunately the county was in the greatest cycle of economic, cultural—and ethical—transformation in its history. The Industrial Revolution created wealth as never before, and with it an ancillary cargo of inflated bonds, stocks, and shaky credit—all enormously lucrative and completely unregulated.

Grant agonized over how to save the achievement of the Civil War and thus ensure freedom to Blacks—when protecting civil rights required millions of dollars and thousands of Federal troops to keep vigilantes and ex-Klansmen from lynching freedmen and terrorizing Republican judges. As his administration wore on, as recession demanded budget cuts, as the country came both to fear the idea of real racial equality and to lament the past horrendous damage wrought on the South, Grant almost alone still insisted on protecting Lincoln's idea of a free and equal Negro populace. Bunting argues, reminiscent of Frederick Douglass, that Grant may well have been the best friend that American Blacks ever had. Had he been nominated for a third term in 1876 or even in 1880, he might well have seen Reconstruction through and thus avoided the rendezvous a century later with the messy effort to end Jim Crow.

As for the terrible scandals—the Credit Mobile, the Sanborn Contracts, the Back Pay Grab, the Indian Trading Scandal, and the Whiskey ring—they finally did Grant the politician in, rapidly eroding all the political capital so incrementally gained from Vicksburg to Appomattox. Bunting notes that Grant was probably neither enriched by nor involved in the malfeasance. But he gives Grant no pass, lamenting that the modesty and diffidence toward detail and acrimony that were his trademarks on the battlefield were near fatal characteristics as president in such an age—a truly heroic man on a horse who nonetheless behind the desk "could not say no to a friend, and not even to a very good friend at that."

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We assume that thousands of stinky cigars caused the throat cancer that felled Grant. Perhaps. But what really killed him at sixty-three was the sudden loss, the year before, of all his hard-earned fortune, through the dishonesty and/or incompetence of his partners (and son)—and his own reoccurring naiveté that this last time really did catch up with him. At sixty-two Ulysses S. Grant was once more flat broke, and reduced to writing Civil War essays (sometimes nit-picked by demanding editors) for $500.

He had come full circle, but just as he kept at it selling leather in Galena, so too now he ignored the disgrace and poverty, and pressed on to write his way back to praise and security. Bunting, the novelist and veteran, warms to the often-told saga of Grant's last heroic struggle to finish his vast 275,000 word memoir and—thanks to Mark Twain, his publisher—leave his family secure in his death in a way he could not in life.

This is a wonderful account about a quintessential but singular American. Some of us might have been more critical of Grant's brand of war as annihilation and still more impressed by the counter-strategy of attrition embraced by William Tecumseh Sherman. More could be said of Grant's continual Clintonian weakness of being awed and impressed by empty celebrities, the talentless rich, and petty Whitewater-like crooks. That being said, Bunting is surely right that without Grant, the Civil War could not have been won in four years—or perhaps won at all, with an unconditional surrender and the abrupt elimination of chattel slavery.

The 60,000-word biography of American presidents, world conquerors, and classic authors—without footnotes—is the latest hot literary genre, as both the present anthology and the celebrity-written Penguin series suggest. I have read many of them. None are more engagingly written or more attuned to clarity of thought and expression than Josiah Bunting's. Grant, the stylist, would have approved.

Authenticity blues

Stanley Crouch
The Artificial White Man:
Essays on Authenticity.
Basic Civitas, 244 pages, $24

reviewed by Stefan Beck

Stanley Crouch's essays on race, masculinity, authenticity, and the arts are generally sober and robust. They are also shot through with jarring colloquialisms and demotic imagery. On page one of his collection *The Artificial White Man: Essays on Authenticity*, we are told that some of Crouch's subjects will be "spanked." Of novelists guilty of lazy or platitudinous treatment of race, he says that they are "[w]alking beneath a flag of white underwear stained fully yellow by liquefied fear." Crouch's engagement of low, folk, and pop culture is heralded by titles like "Baby Boy Blues," "Segregated Fiction Blues," and "Blues for the Artificial White Man."

That alone will raise the hackles of some readers. And though Crouch does not consistently convince us of his offbeat positions, his fusion of "low" subject matter with high intelligence achieves a kind of exhilarating effect. Reading his essays is like having a cant-free conversation with a clever, passionate, albeit frustrating, friend. Given Crouch's overarching themes, it is the right sort of talk with just the right sort of mind.

Little in Crouch's writing marks him as a "conservative" in the usual sense. Few conservatives could stomach, much less write, a seventy-page paean to the filmmaker Quentin Tarantino's radical racial vision ("Blues in More Than One Color"). Yet Crouch places himself in the ranks of black conservatives, like John McWhorter, who denounce the cancer of barbarism growing in black popular culture. He is vocally disgusted by hip-hop music's "neo-Sambo . . . mugging or scowling" with "gold teeth, drop-down pants, and tasteless jewelry." He bravely chastises producers and "artists" who peddle the same "bullying, hedonistic buf-

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foons" D. W. Griffith portrayed in *Birth of a Nation*.

The spark and originality of Crouch's criticism—what will make it impossible to ignore him—is that he takes the customary disgust of conservative critics and goes it one better. He derides the purveyors of crudity because they *are*, after all, guilty, but he sees the real danger in a wider cultural trend, one more to do with "authenticity anxiety" than race. That trend is the belief, slipped into circulation by the liberal intellectual elite, that what is most "real" is what is most base, most closely allied to the loutish ways of the lower orders.

In his title essay, "Blues for the Artificial White Man," Crouch lifts up a rock of intellectual legitimacy to show us the damp creep of ugly, predatory neuroses beneath it. What he inspects, with equal parts revulsion and fascination, is David Shields's *Black Planet: Facing Race During an NBA Season*. Shields, a white suburbanite who teaches writing at the University of Washington, is infatuated with Gary Payton, a black basketball player (star of the Seattle SuperSonics when the book was written) known both for his athletic skill and nasty "trash talk." For Shields, Payton is a rebel against Shield's "social frame . . . a supposedly vacuous geniality that the writer battles by being as rude and obnoxious in public as he can, making the teenage subtext of his own life clear." Shields practically deifies Payton for his very worst attributes.

Crouch is appalled by this "immaturity . . . the result of a *willful* adolescence, not the helpless hell-raising of a person so poorly educated or underdeveloped that experience is never assessed beyond the perspectives of a teenage boy." In simpler terms: *Grow up! You of all people ought to* know *better*. Unfortunately, many intelligent people seem *not* to know better, and so negative attitudes are reinforced, to wildly destructive effect—while the "intellectuals" play-act, like Marie Antoinette at Rambouillet, at being underclass types.

Anthony Daniels has said that, thanks to the elite's rejection of middle-class respectability, "the poor have been deprived of any useful model to emulate." Crouch would agree. Crouch would also agree that he, McWhorter, Thomas Sowell, *et al.* have no influence on the young people (and, sadly, even adults) who emulate the thug model—chances are, these unfortunate souls read little cultural commentary. So—if one may ask an awkward question—who *are* they writing for? Who do they hope or expect to change?

In the case of Crouch's essays, the answers are clear. For one, he writes to reassure us that however destructive the authenticity crisis has been—both to behavior patterns and to ideas about race—it *is* being quietly but forcefully addressed in various quarters. For another, he writes to put the so-called intellectuals on notice: he is tired of condescension, of casual, unconscious racism, of worn-out P.C. pieties. Since his is an almost uncomfortably direct approach—"naming names" with fearless abandon—he has a very real hope of changing the terms of the battle.

We might cringe to read Crouch's glowing endorsement of John Singleton's *Baby Boy*, a film about ghetto life that—if it has not been forgotten, or supplanted by other, exploitative works—might easily be mistaken for a glorification of that experience. So be it. The hard fact is that young men and women heretofore lost to that world will *see* that film, whereas they will not scrawl marginalia in *The Artificial White Man* and adjust their activities or aspirations accordingly. Crouch's celebration of *Baby Boy*—which handily demonstrates the degrading futility of "thug life"—is a dart directed at complacency of any color. And it is a reminder that lives are deeply affected by pop cultural influences, for better or for worse—while, well out of sight, conservatives squawk and liberals crow.

Crouch's essays on literature ("Segregated Fiction Blues") and popular film ("Blues in More Than One Color") show most vividly the sway that pop culture holds over our conversations about race and authenticity. It

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may be difficult to swallow, but Quentin Tarantino's savage movies do more to change and reinforce popular ideas about race relations than do any ten John McWhorters:

> We have the perpetual theme of miscegenation and partnerships that cross ethnic and sexual lines, cultures and traditions. . . . [Tarantino] is a major force in American art because of how well he understands the interplay between human themes that are as old as the species and the omnivorous strength and weakness of a popular culture that defines itself by borrowing, by appropriating, by defiling. Above all, no one understands better than he the many miscegenations that make our modern world the unprecedented thing that it is.

Whether this is true ("no one understands better" is certainly pushing it), it gives us a good idea of what Crouch demands from the culture: an acknowledgment that none of us is purely this or that, white or black, high or low. Therein lies our authenticity—not, as too many believe, in familiarity, in easy, tired badges of group affiliation. For Crouch, "miscegenation" is about combination, creation, originality—but not race, really. Thus, when discussing the failures of modern fiction, he tells us:

> In essence, Hemingway's dictum of writing about what you know has become an excuse for avoiding risks. Since Hemingway wrote about a wide mix of people, some American, some not, it's clear the great writer wasn't advising those who took up his craft to isolate themselves from the world. . . . What you know might be something you took the time and went somewhere to discover.

Spot on. This should be read, too, as an invitation to "know" something other than what the self-appointed dictators of the "appropriate," "sensitive," or "socially useful" have allowed us. All one need do is follow Crouch's example—be honest, risk a great deal of scorn, and prepare to be genuinely startled by what reality reveals.

An impossible dream

T. R. Reid
The United States of Europe:
The New Superpower and the End of American Supremacy.
The Penguin Press, 320 pages, $9.95

reviewed by Gerald Frost

On May 1st 2004, ten countries with a combined population of 74 million became members of the European Union, bringing the total number of member states to twenty-five and the E.U. population to 454 million. This means that the E.U. now has a population half as big again as that of the United States and a gross domestic product almost as great as that of its Atlantic relation.

However, quite what kind of political entity has been created is a matter of dispute and, in important respects, the future of this flawed but vastly ambitious project remains uncertain. According to Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, the E.U. is "a superpower but not a superstate"—although it is not at all obvious how Europe can be the first of these things without also acquiring the trappings of the second.

According to T. R. Reid, the E.U. is "a new species of united states: a largely borderless federal union that is not exactly a single country, but is much more than just another international trading bloc." President Chirac insists that the E.U. is a federation of states; British ministers routinely take to the broadcasting stations to deny this whenever he does so. Out of deference to British sensibilities the proposal to rename the E.U. the "United States of Europe" was dropped from the text of the proposed European Constitution.

It is, however, certainly true that the trend of European politics has been in the direction of "ever closer union," a goal which was unambiguously stated in the founding Treaty of Rome in 1957. In recent decades, among political leaders of the first rank, only Margaret Thatcher has taken de Gaulle's vision of a *Europe des patries* seri-

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ously. On leaving office, her greatest regret was that she failed utterly to breathe new life into that concept and consequently failed to halt the erosion of British sovereignty as the process of European political integration gathered pace.

There is also no doubt that many of the architects of the European project intended from the very beginning to create a rival to the United States and that anti-Americanism played a major part in their motivation. Even so, few in Europe would suggest that their goal has yet been fully realized, while a significant and growing number plainly do not share that aim at all. Indeed, one of the more remarkable aspects of Reid's book is that it claims more on behalf of the European political project—even in its subtitle—than the most ardent supporters of the E.U. Among the latter, much contemporary debate now recognizes that the E.U. can *never* rival the U.S. in terms of economic, military, or political power. Reid's conclusion—that Americans must wake up to "the reality that the planet has a second superpower whose global influence will continue to grow as the world moves towards a bi-polar world"—is consequently difficult to take seriously.

Indeed, one of the biggest problems for a reviewer is to account for Reid's views when the factual basis for them seems so questionable. Inevitably, one concludes that he is convinced that Europe now constitutes a superpower rival to the U.S. because he believes that this would place welcome limits on U.S. power, that he likes and approves of the E.U. because he dislikes and disapproves of contemporary America. If his book fails to persuade, it is not just that it is unscholarly—it is almost entirely unsourced and there is no index—but because it is devoid of intellectual rigor and partial in its selection of facts.

Rather in the manner of a character in a Henry James novel, he is fascinated and impressed by much of what he is told on his European travels, but unlike James's characters he does not achieve that level of moral and intellectual enlightenment necessary to see behind the appearance of things. Indeed, he is so enthusiastic about the "geopolitical earthquake" which he believes is shaping European and world politics that he does not seem to have noticed the concerns of millions of ordinary Europeans. These include the continent's dismal levels of economic growth, its high levels of unemployment and dysfunctional labor market, its rapidly falling share of world trade, its striking lack of democratic accountability, its inability to equip itself with modern armed forces, and its failure to halt the flow of E.U. funds that disappear through corruption and waste.

Even where Reid acknowledges the existence of major problems—for example, the endless torrent of absurd and costly regulations that emerge from the E.U. Commission and the severe demographic problems arising from a plunging birth-rate in almost all parts of the E.U.—he fails to convey the extent of the problem or to grasp its significance.

Although Reid is a former head of the *Washington Post*'s London bureau, he has little understanding of the causes behind the rising tide of euroskepticism in Britain and in other European countries. He seems unaware of the widening and potentially explosive gulf in attitudes between Europe's opinion-forming elites (almost entirely in favor of the E.U.) and ordinary citizens (increasingly suspicious or hostile to the idea of further E.U. integration). British ambivalence towards the "European project" is simply dismissed as "schizophrenia." Is growing euroskepticism in Poland, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Portugal, and the Czech Republic also to be explained in terms of mental disorder?

Some of Reid's claims would be too much even for the E.U.'s PR department, so implausible are they. His reason for counting the euro as a "sky-rocketing success" is that its introduction occurred without technical hitch and that during its relatively brief but eventful life it has risen against the dollar. He does not mention that before it started its climb it lost a third of its value or

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that it has proved the most unstable of all the world's major currencies, or that, even now, some economists believe that it is unlikely to survive. Despite his extensive European travels he does not seem to have noticed that because of the public's distinct lack of enthusiasm for the euro (which was widely blamed for the price rises that followed its introduction), shops and business still quote in old currencies as well as new.

Prior to its launch, critics of the single currency argued that in the absence of a common language and a flexible labor market it would be impossible for the European Central Bank to set a single interest rate that suited all. The critics have been proved right; without exception growth rates in the non-eurozone economies have been higher than those within the eurozone and unemployment rates lower (In 2003, the eurozone growth rate was 0.4 compared to 2.1 percent in the U.K., 3 percent in the U.S., 9 percent in China.) Remarkably, there is no mention of the E.U.'s Growth and Stability Pact which was supposed to impose constraints on public spending within the eurozone, but which has been repeatedly violated by France and Germany, its two biggest members. The fact that the huge fines handed out to these countries have not been paid and that there is no consensus about what, if anything, should replace the Pact, does not augur well for the currency's long-term viability.

Still more unsatisfactory is the author's attempts to demonstrate the existence of an emerging European consciousness, although these are not without unintended humor. The reality is that despite the best efforts of Europe's political elites and the E.U. Commission, European Man stubbornly refuses to be born. The E.U.'s own polling data demonstrates that a sense of European identity remains weak or nonexistent: more than half of Austrians, Britons, Greeks, Swedes, and Finns, and an almost equal number of Irish, Dutch, and Portuguese report that they feel no sense of European identity. In the absence of such sentiment there can be no European people, no European public space or demos, and no viable system of self-government.

Reid seems to believe that the so-called "E-Generation" will embrace European nationhood with the ardor that its elders lack. The polling data does not bear this out; in some countries, most notably Britain (where half the population favors withdrawal from the E.U.) the eighteen- to-twenty-four-year-olds are among the most hostile to the E.U. Given the very high levels high of youth unemployment in the eurozone perhaps this is not altogether surprising.

One does not quite know what to make of his claims to have witnessed the emergence of a distinctive European popular culture. In support of this claim, Reid cites the commercial success of the Eurovision song contest. This he rightly acknowledges is little more than "a tawdry pageant," but one which, apparently, he believes helps provide cultural cement. Yet, as he also acknowledges those taking part include Israel, Turkey, and Russia as well as non-E.U. Europeans. Indeed, the success of the competition has surely much more to do with globalization and the emergence of a universal pop culture (whose origins are to be found in the U.S.) than with the E.U.; it would survive if the supranational institutions of the E.U. imploded.

Still more bizarrely, Reid attributes a remarkable role to the game of football in the building of a sense of European nationhood. He quotes a French TV salesman that he met: "Football brings millions and millions of us together—football *is* Europe, don't you see. If I meet somebody from England or Norway or Spain, I just say, 'David Beckham,' and we immediately have something we share." It seems almost churlish to point out that the name of David Beckham (a British footballer) produces exactly the same sort of response in Japan, China, Taiwan, and Singapore; that Norwegians have repeatedly rejected E.U. membership; and that millions of euros have to be spent on complex policing and intelligence operations to prevent rival sets

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of fans from attacking one another whenever European national teams compete.

There are more serious matters for U.S. observers of the European scene to ponder. For nearly half a century, America gave unconditional support to the political and economic development of the European Union. It did so in the belief that it would lead to the creation of a viable democratic market-based Atlantic partner with whom a burden of international responsibilities might be shared. Whatever the ultimate fate of the European political project, the reality is quite different. A better book would have explained why.

Shorter notices

Walker Evans
Many Are Called,
introduction by James Agee,
foreword by Luc Sante,
afterword by Jeff L. Rosenheim.
Yale University Press, 208 pages, $40

It has been said that the past is a foreign country, where things were done differently. This reissue of Walker Evans's *Many Are Called*, first published in 1966 and consisting of ninety duotone prints of photographs taken in the New York City subways in the late 1930s and early 1940s, is indeed a vivid reminder of how quickly even the recent past acquires a look that is markedly distant from our present experience.

From a twenty-first-century perspective, the most striking aspects of the New York subway riders in Evans's photographs are their middle-class dress and demeanor. The majority of male and female adults in these pictures are wearing proper hats and coats. With few exceptions, the men are clean-shaven and the women's faces are made-up with care. (There isn't a baseball cap to be seen in a single picture.) Nothing looks crazy or even unseemly. Ordinary people are granted their privacy and dignity.

When we descend into the New York subways today, what we are likely to encounter are slovenly dress and a kind of casual exhibitionism. There is an abundance of tattoos to be seen on the persons of the younger men and women, and an even greater abundance of metal piercings, not only on the ears but the lips, the nose, the chin, and even the tongue, not to mention the exposed navels that are now the fashion for many young women—and even some of the boys—who, whatever their weight, have managed to squeeze themselves into the low-slung, tight-fitting jeans and abbreviated t-shirts that are now a standard uniform. The days are gone when most adults still "dressed up" when they left home for either business or pleasure.

It is, of course, the fast pace of life in New York that compels its inhabitants to reinvent themselves in every generation. This is what makes Evans's *Many Are Called* so different in feeling and implication from his more celebrated collaboration with James Agee in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, their epic account of Southern sharecroppers. Whereas the subway riders lived their lives, literally and otherwise, in an environment of rapid change, the sharecroppers lived theirs in a condition of social and moral stasis that remained immune to change. It was a large part of Evans's genius that he was so closely attuned to the nuances of these radical differences.

—*Hilton Kramer*

Russell Kirk
Ancestral Shadows:
An Anthology of Ghostly Tales,
introduction by Vigen Guroian.
Eerdmans, 406 pages, $25

Russell Kirk, patriarch of conservative thought, believed in ghosts. (Surprised? But what could be more "conservative—that is, backward and wrong-headed—than embracing an ignorant medieval superstition?) Well, maybe he didn't *believe* in them. We'll never know. He did *write* plenty about them, and he is to be congratulated for it. His ghost stories, gathered in a new volume called *Ancestral Shadows: An Anthology of Ghostly Tales*,

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are strange and welcome meat for the bones of conservative thought.

In Kirk's hands, ghost stories are morality plays, not penny-dreadful amusements. Kirk the medium is a messenger—and his message is: if you think you can discard the wisdom or the mystery of our ancestral past, you're dead wrong. Quoting another prominent conservative: "there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know." In the present day more than ever, there is much that we don't care to know we don't know, and do everything in our power to avoid pondering: moral responsibility, death, what comes after death, and all those punishments that—whether or not we *do* receive them—we may richly deserve.

The release of *Ancestral Shadows* coincides with the rerelease, by Penguin Classics, of Jorge Luis Borges's *Universal History of Iniquity*—another collection of complex and morally instructive tales masquerading as what Graham Greene famously called "entertainments." Perhaps the success of these books will be a prelude to renewed interest in questions of morality, and in simple, unpretentious narrative as a vehicle for those questions. Whatever the case, Kirk's gripping shadows provide unexpected warmth to a literary culture in which the ancient art of storytelling has all but gone cold.

—*Stefan Beck*

Jewel Spears Brooker, editor
T. S. Eliot:
The Contemporary Reviews.
Cambridge University Press,
600 pages, $110

This is the tenth volume in The American Critical Archive series, a splendid scholarly project of the old school, by which I do not mean old hat. On the contrary, by documenting (as the series editor M. Thomas Inge puts it in his preface) "a part of a writer's career that is usually difficult to examine, that is, the immediate response to each work as it was made public by reviewers in contemporary newspapers and journals," these volumes form an indispensable resource for any serious student of the writers in question. Earlier volumes have been devoted to classic American authors from Edith Wharton and Henry James to John Steinbeck and Walt Whitman. The current volume, ably edited by the Eliot scholar Jewel Spears Brooker, supplements if it does not replace the (also excellent) two volumes devoted to Eliot in the Critical Heritage series (1982). Brooker has gathered together hundreds of contemporary notices and reviews of Eliot's work from 1916, when *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* appeared, to 1959, when notices of *The Elder Statesman*, Eliot's last play, made the rounds.

Eliot has been a literary and cultural titan for decades. It was not always thus. Among the earliest reviews was a raised-eyebrow dismissal from Arthur Waugh (father of Evelyn), who read *Prufrock* in an anthology and took to the pages of the *Quarterly Review* to thunder about "the unmetrical, incoherent banalities of these literary 'Cubists,'" etc., etc. (Brooker tells us that the phrase "literary Cubists" was a cause of much mirth to Ezra Pound.)

Waugh's wasn't the only assault. An anonymous review of "recent verse" in *Literary World* in 1917, for example, sneered about Eliot's being "one of those clever young men who find it amusing to pull the leg of a sober reviewer." Meanwhile Pound was working overtime to assure his protégé a more respectful reception: "It is quite safe," Pound wrote in 1917, "to compare Mr. Eliot's work with anything written in French, English or American since the death of Jules Laforgue."

In accordance with the plan of the series, Brooker has included only pieces in English. Because of space constraints she has had to leave out some notices, especially some longer ones, but she ends every section with a useful "checklist of additional reviews." This is scholarship in the traditional sense, i.e., it represents a good deal of hard work in the library and actually illuminates the subject under discussion.

—*Roger Kimball*

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Notebook

Thom Gunn, 1929–2004

by Paul Dean

Leaving aside the fact that there will always be some who disapprove of Thom Gunn on principle, it would be easy to read his life and career as a cautionary tale: the young poet of prodigious assurance and power, a modern Metaphysical, who squandered his gifts on the hippydom of 1960s California, slackened his line, coarsened his feelings, and banalized his diction. Those who think this might concede that his elegies to AIDS victims in the early 1990s marked a partial return to form, followed by the unevenness of his last volume, *Boss Cupid* (2000).

Not surprisingly, Gunn did not see things that way. For him, the much-admired early poem "On the Move" exhibited an excessive formality and abstraction, as well as a kind of posing, from which he later sought to break free. The poems—many, ironically, in strict meter—that he wrote under the influence of drugs gave him the courage to use associative imagery, to be more formally experimental, and to move from meter to syllabics to free verse with new confidence. He found a voice which he felt was more direct, more honest—especially about his sexuality—and more generous. He never understood why he was seen as a celebrant of violence, and remained grateful to Ted Hughes, with whom he shared a well-known *Selected Poems* in 1962, for insisting that "Thom Gunn's is the poetry of tenderness."

A careful read-through of the poems shows, predictably, some truth on both sides. Fifty or sixty of Gunn's three hundred poems seem to me successful: not a bad proportion. Yes, the earlier collections may be stronger, although there are stronger individual poems in later collections; yes, there are misfires and uncertainties in the poems of the 1960s and 1970s, as there were in most poets' work at that time, I guess; yes, *Boss Cupid* is a rather disappointing finale. Yet Gunn was always willing to risk false starts, blind alleys, bad taste, cheap effects, failed poems, in pursuit of an art which was also a craft. He disliked repeating himself—something that even a poet's admirers sometimes cannot forgive.

Despite Gunn's reservations, I do admire "On the Move." The change in his style can be focused by comparing some moments from that and later poems:

> One is not necessarily discord
> On earth; or damned because, half animal,
> One lacks direct instinct, because one wakes
> Afloat on movement that divides and breaks.
> One joins the movement in a valueless world,
> Choosing it, till, both hurler and the hurled,
> One moves as well, always toward, toward.

Gunn isn't necessarily endorsing these sentiments; the poem is as much a critique as an expression of the herd-instinct. Towards what does one move? Gunn asked—and felt it a weakness that he hadn't made it clear. Yet that's the point: to be "on the move" in "a valueless world" (a world without fixed

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values, and/or a world with no intrinsic value) is enough; it gives the illusion of purposefulness, which is all the biker-heroes of the poem have, however much they may believe their movement is really significant.

In "From the Wave," which appeared in *Moly* (1971) some fifteen years later, Gunn uses surfing as the occasion for writing about poise and survival. He says of the surfers, "It is the wave they imitate/ Keeps them so still":

> The mindless heave of which they rode
> A fluid shelf
> Breaks as they leave it, falls and, slowed,
> Loses itself.

Rhythmically this is more subtle than the somewhat over-emphatic pentameter of "one wakes/ Afloat on movement that divides and breaks." The syntax here mimics the swell and dispersal of the water, and the alternating eight- and four-syllable lines allow greater variety. In terms of ideas, "From the Wave" has ceased to worry about the direction of movement: "Balance is triumph in this place,/ Triumph possession." Poise, like value, lies in the act of riding the wave.

In "Lament," one of the elegies for AIDS victims in *The Man with Night Sweats* (1992), the image is terrifyingly different:

> Meanwhile,
> Your lungs collapsed, and the machine,
> unstrained,
> Did all your breathing now. Nothing remained
> But death by drowning on an inland sea
> Of your own fluids . . .

The edgy, breathy effect of the first sentence (not itself "unstrained," we note) is expertly underplayed. Survival is purpose, now: value emerges, starkly, from one's demeanor in the face of "death by drowning." This is a grown-up version of the Existentialism which Gunn was dallying with as a young man: the simultaneous necessity, and loneliness, of acts of choice.

Gunn was far from being the irresponsible hedonist of his detractors' caricature. His relationship with Mike Kitay, whom he met at Cambridge, endured for fifty years. "Tamer and Hawk," which Gunn confirmed was addressed to Kitay, celebrates a loving and voluntary self-giving:

> Through having only eyes
> For you I fear to lose,
> I lose to keep, and choose
> Tamer as prey.

This is not sentimental; the image of taming acknowledges the difficulty of adjustment. The voluntariness is important; coercion leads to possessiveness. Surrender of independence must be chosen. Another poem addressed to Kitay, "In Trust" (from *Boss Cupid*), concludes:

> We'll hug each other while we can,
> Work or stray while we must.
> Nothing is, or ever will be,
> Mine, I suppose. No one can hold a heart,
> But what we hold in trust
> We do hold, even apart.

This looks back to the opening poem of *The Man with Night Sweats*, "The Hug," which remembers a moment when Gunn awoke one night to feel Kitay embracing him:

> It was not sex, but I could feel
> The whole strength of your body set,
> Or braced, to mine,
> And locking me to you
> As if we were still twenty-two [. . .]
> My quick sleep had deleted all
> Of intervening time and place.
> I only knew
> The stay of your secure firm dry embrace.

"It was not sex" is a quotation from John Donne's "The Ecstasy," which also depicts two lovers embracing:

> 'This ecstasy doth unperplex'
> (We said) 'and tell us what we love;
> We see by this, it was not sex;
> We see, we saw not what did move . . .'

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Here, Donne is, I think, the first to use "sex" in its modern meaning. His great poem of the "interinanimation" of two souls is pertinent to "The Hug," whose precision of diction (note the progression "set . . . braced . . . locking . . . stay") and concluding unromantic observation make it a tauter poem than "In Trust." It may not be unimportant, also, that Donne's poem turns on paradoxes of movement and stillness.

As this example suggests, Gunn never lost his youthful "metaphysical" strain. It's behind his two excellent books of essays, *The Occasions of Poetry* (1982) and *Shelf Life* (1993). He learned from F. R. Leavis and Yvor Winters—who learned it from Eliot—the basic tenet that, in the metaphysical poem, form and content, thought and feeling, are inseparable. In his middle period he was perhaps more interested in upsetting that balance than in maintaining it, but he unswervingly believed in the *discipline* of poetry, welcoming Eliot's ideal of "impersonality" and scorning "confessional" poetry as well as overmuch theory. He was more interested in poets than in poetics, he said; people who like Ginsberg and people who like Herrick should be able to learn from each other. The range in these critical books is impressive: Jonson, Greville, Hardy, Bunting, and Pound all receive distinguished coverage. Gunn had an especially high regard for Robert Duncan, whose fusion of the traditional and the avant-garde he respected. At his best, that was something Gunn himself achieved.

One "metaphysical" element missing from Gunn's temperament, however, was religion. "I am for ever grateful," he wrote, "that my brother and I were brought up in no religion at all." His long-delayed poem on his mother's suicide, "The Gas-Poker," which appeared in *Boss Cupid*, imagines the instrument of death as exactly that—an instrument played by his mother to make her own funeral music. There are no consolations. Commenting on his AIDS elegies, he expressed admiration for his friends' bravery by saying, "So many of one's values—for humanist atheists like myself, as opposed to religious people—arise in confrontation with death." This surprisingly misunderstands "religious people," most of whom find death no easier to cope with, and no less formative of values, than anyone else. Overall, though, I would not say that Gunn's work lacks a sense of mystery or of the numinous. For his epitaph, I would choose this invocation of the sun from "Sunlight":

> Great seedbed, yellow centre of the flower,
> Flower on its own, without a root or stem,
> Giving all colour and all shape their power,
> Still recreating in defining them,
>
> Enable us, altering like you, to enter
> Your passionless love, impartial but intense,
> And kindle in acceptance round your centre,
> Petals of light lost in your innocence.

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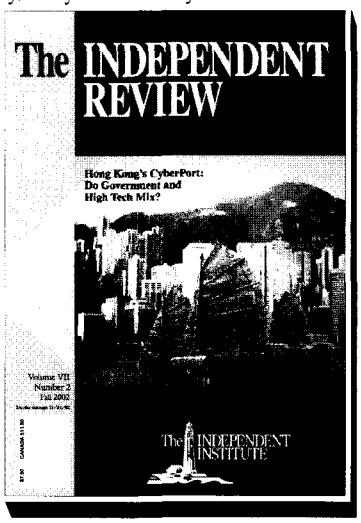
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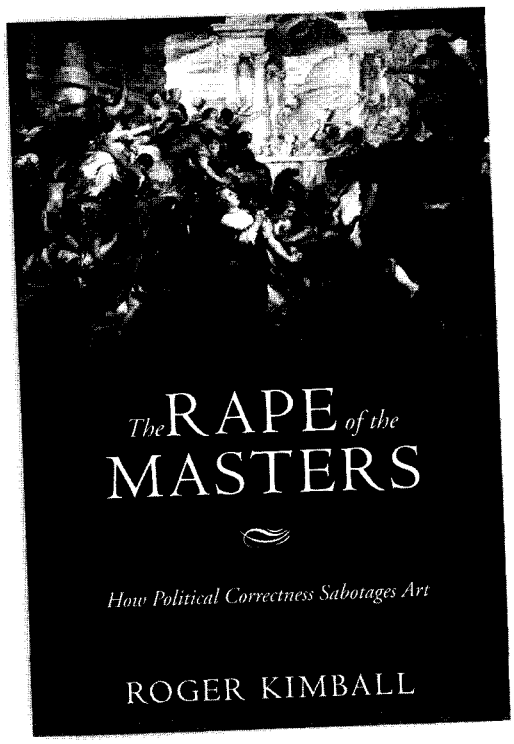

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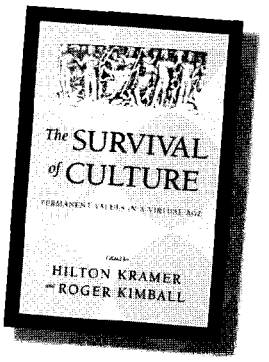
The Survival of Culture

Permanent Values in a Virtual Age



In these important and wide-ranging essays drawn from *The New Criterion*, ten distinguished critics reflect on the direction of our society, emphasizing the dangers that threaten our institutions as well as the vivifying survivals that are worth cherishing and nurturing. The contributors include Robert H. Bork, Anthony Daniels, Martin Greenberg, Roger Kimball, Kenneth Minogue, Eric Ormsby, David Pryce-Jones, Diana Schaub, Mark Steyn, and Keith Windschuttle. Vividly written, these reflections are guaranteed to spark controversy and debate.

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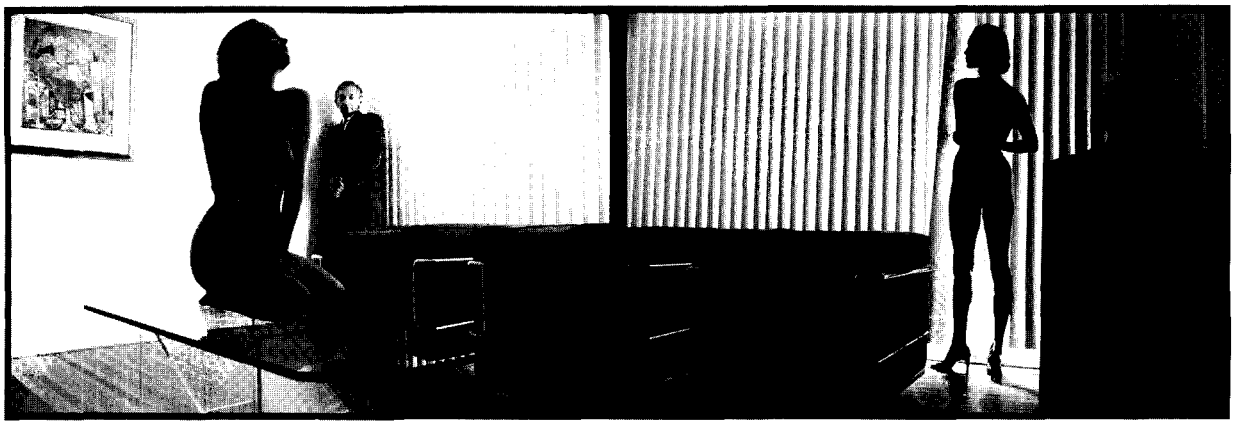

LOUIS STERN WITH SERENA SCOTT JEFF REESE 1992

Now, there is one aesthetic theory, which comes from one of the greatest Classical artists of all time- namely, Schiller - that makes a bold bid to solve simultaneously the problem of artistic creativity and that of aesthetic gratification. This derivation of the problem of art from the *play-instinct* seems to me, even at the present day, to be a safe starting-point for a psychological voyage of discovery into the dark realm of aesthetic. In his famous letters: *Über die äesthetische Erziehung des Menschen*, Schiller places the individual between the two worlds of the senses (reality) and the will (moral), to which he ascribes, on the one hand, the material-instinct, and, on the other, the form-instinct. The play-instinct gives expression and life to both in harmonious union, and the result is beauty.

Otto Rank, Art and Artist. 1932. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

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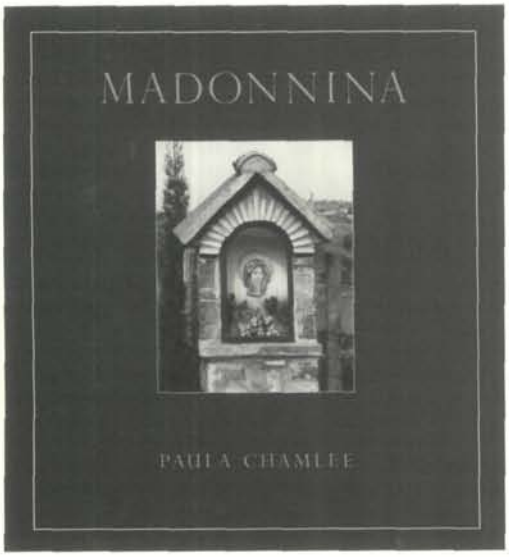

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